ARGOSY

NOVEMBER, 1958

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THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

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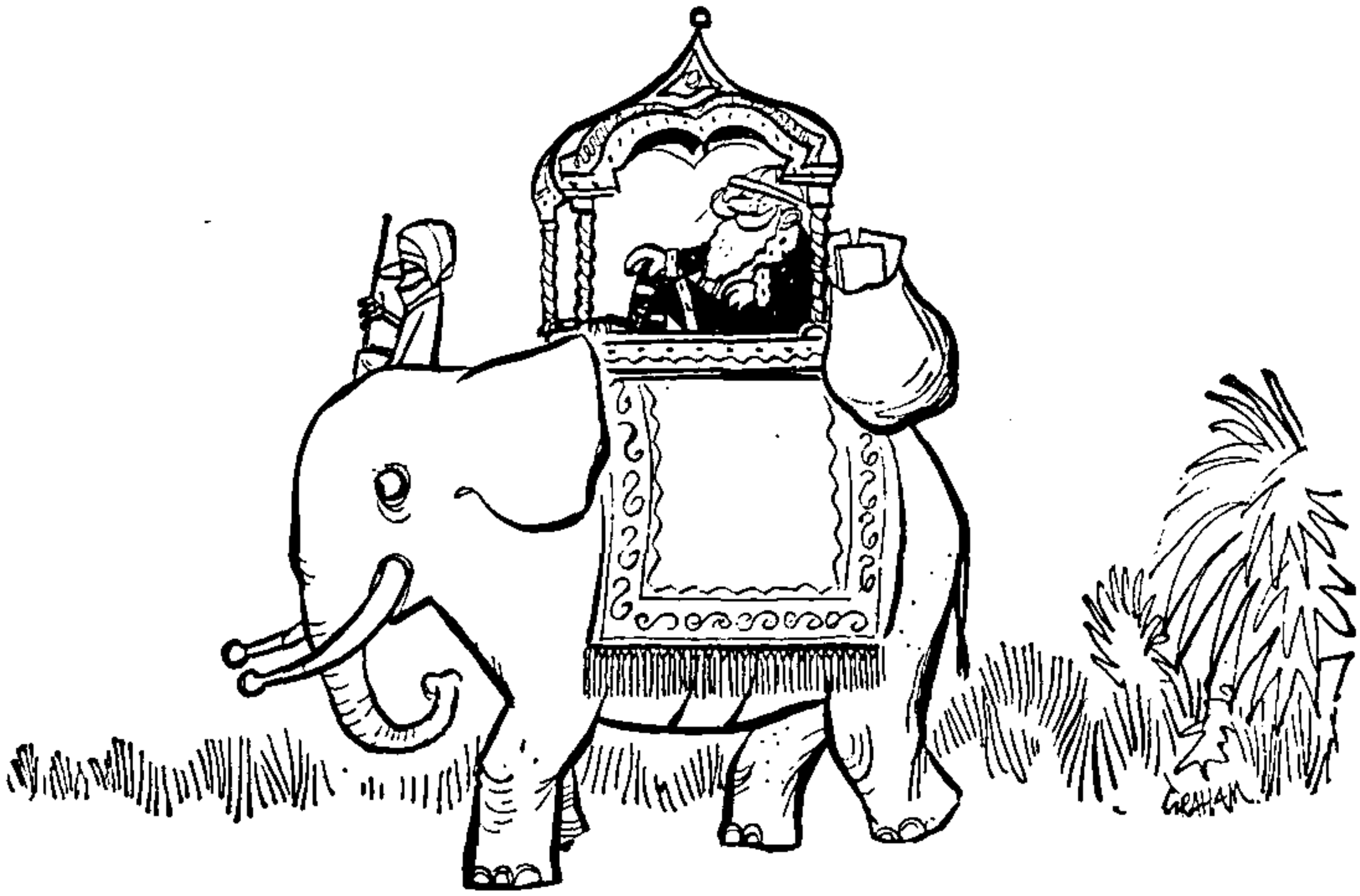

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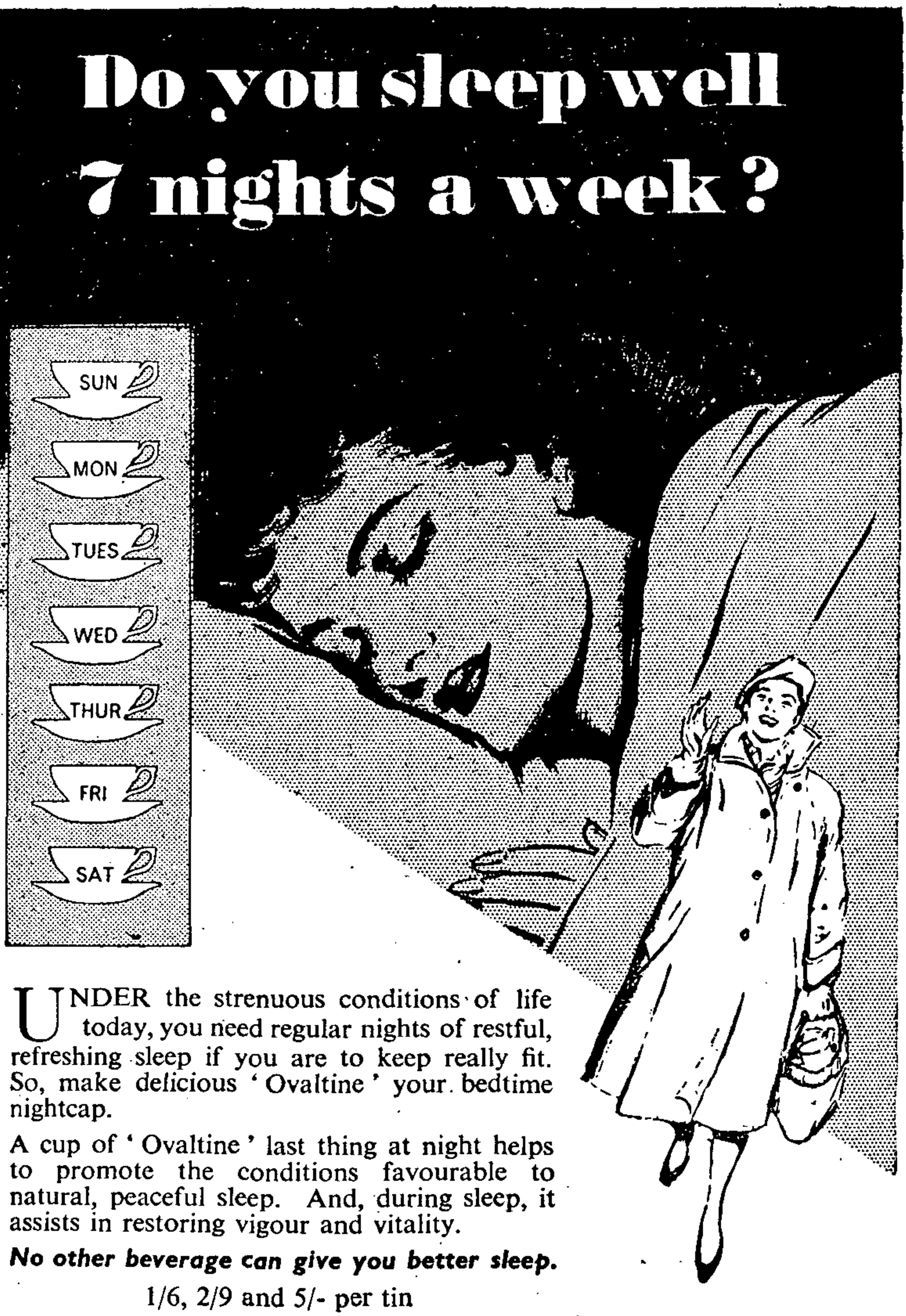

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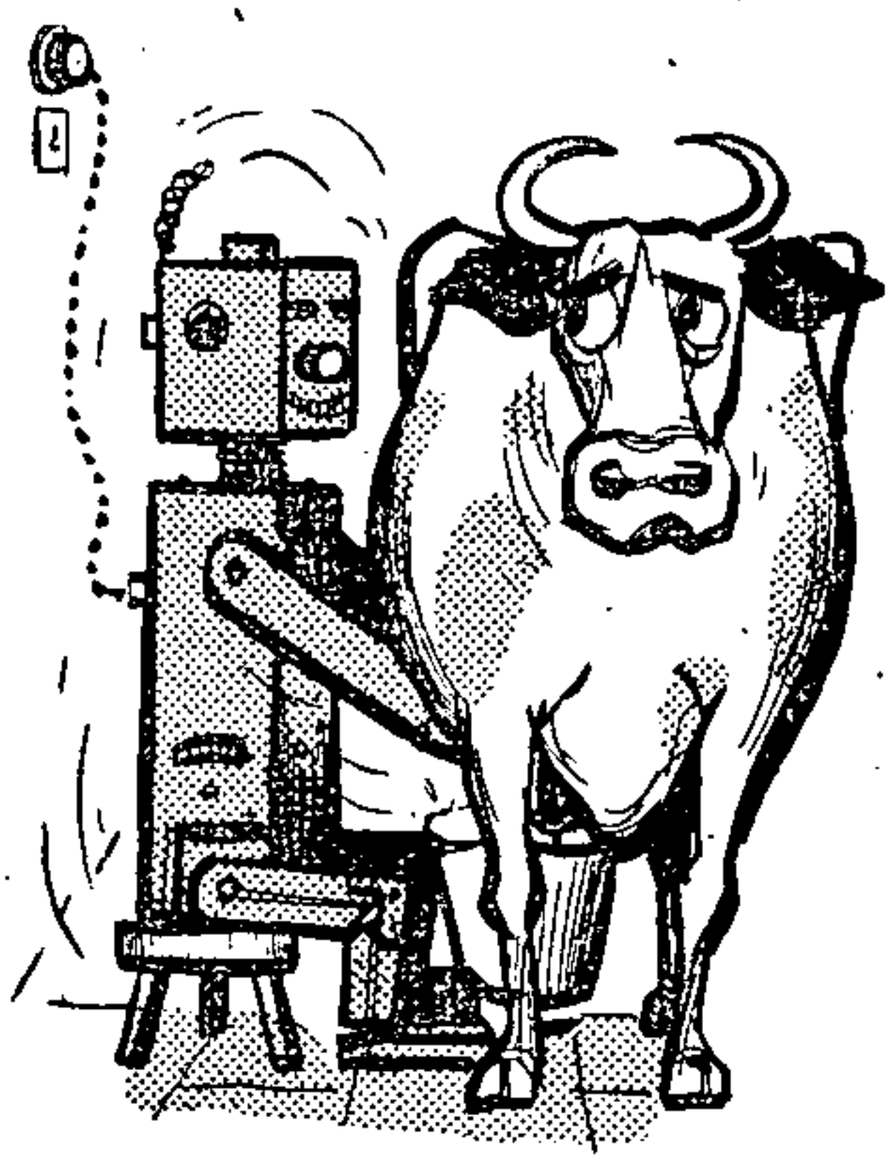


Log Book

IT was pleasant to learn from a recent report that in England alone there are getting on for two-and-a-half million cows, and that nearly two hundred thousand persons are occupied in milking them every twelve hours. A country which, one had assumed, was almost entirely given over to mechanization and self-service must, on the contrary, be packed almost shoulder-to-shoulder with sweet-breathed, large-eyed ruminants, rosy-faced old men, and apple-cheeked dairymaids on three-legged stools.

Unfortunately the report, *Planning the Farm to Save Labour*, finds that too many man-hours are spent in milking these cows, and recommends the introduction of herring-bone milking-parlours, in which the cows are packed diagonally on two levels and machine-milked in turn, while the cowman operates from a long narrow pit between the rows. If the cows take to this routine, the report says, it may set a pattern for labour economy. *If* they take to it.

Somehow we wonder if they will. We can imagine Patrick O'Leary, largest milk-producer in County Kerry, singing cajolingly to his reluctant herd:

" Will yez walk into my parlour, sez the cowman to the cow,
'Tis the prettiest, snuggest little parlour, so let me show yez how :
Polka sideways,
Like a racehorse,
And I'm ready for ye now."

But, the report goes on to add warningly, the cows ought to be given some individual attention at other times to make up for what they lose over milking this way. Patrick ignores the warning, and consequently Ballybree Belle, the pride of Kerry, begins

hoof-sucking, fighting the other milkers, refusing her cowcake, and generally showing signs of being a Deprived Cow, who will shortly develop into a Teddy Cow if the tendency is not nipped in the bud.

She ignores the shouts of " Cusha, musha, wisha, acushla! " and stays morosely out on the bog instead of wiping her feet and coming into the parlour with the others.

Patrick has to call in a psycowatrist.

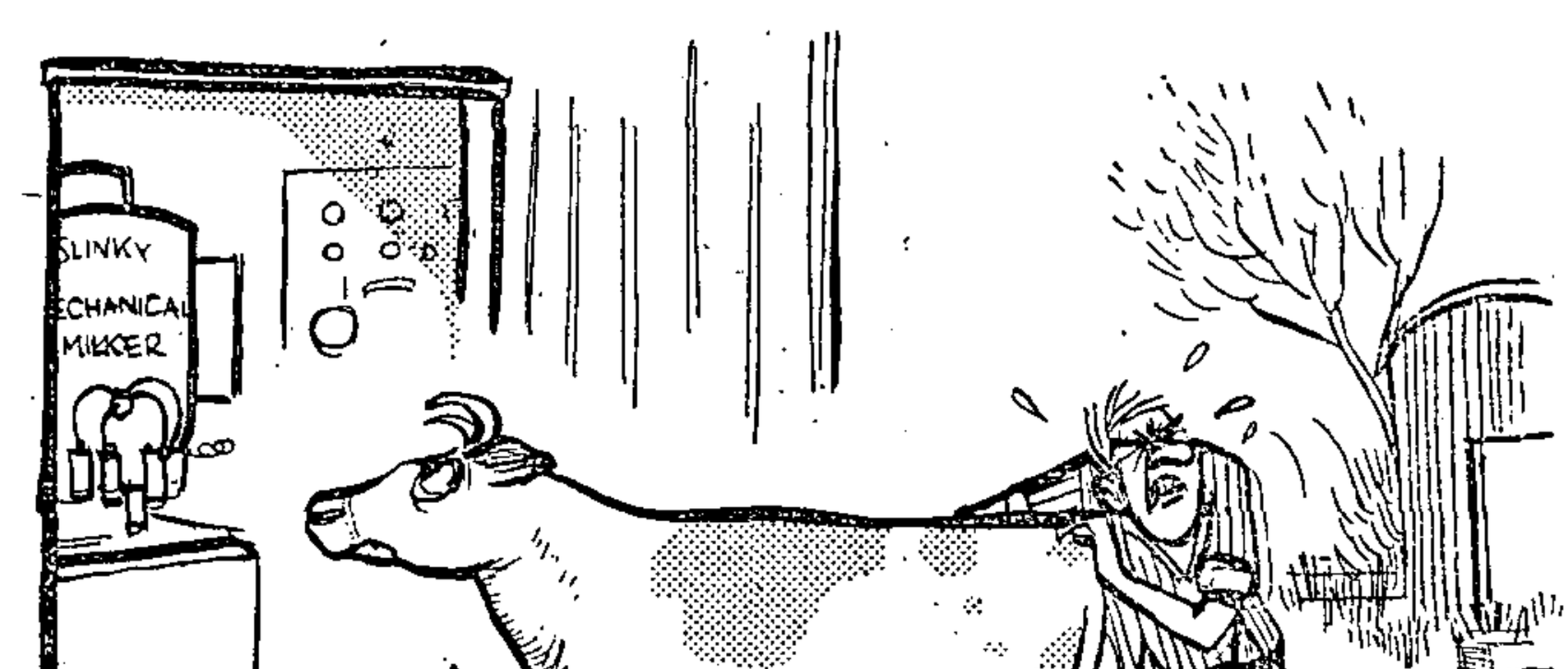
" Dhé, the trouble I'm in, man o," he laments. " Not a weeshy bite or sup will she take, only the whisky, and I'm after having complaints from the Dairy Company that her milk's ninety-per-cent proof. T.T.! they say to me, 'tis milk that would be breaking the heart of a total abstainer. What ails her at all, doctor, tell me that? "

" She's suffering from lack of attention," says the psycowatrist, who has no time to talk Irish. " There are four remedies—Counter-conditioning, Negative adaptation, Change of environment, or Social imitation. Myself I should recommend counter-conditioning. And you must make sure that she gets some extra petting. She thinks you aren't fond of her any more."

" How will I counter-condition her, doctor dear? "

" How do you occupy all those man-hours that you save with your herring-bone parlour? " the doctor asks.

" Sure I spend it ennobling me soul an' edjucating me faculties reading Argosy, the grandest little broth of a magazine betwixt Ballycastle and Ballynacallagh! "



"There's your solution then," says the doctor.

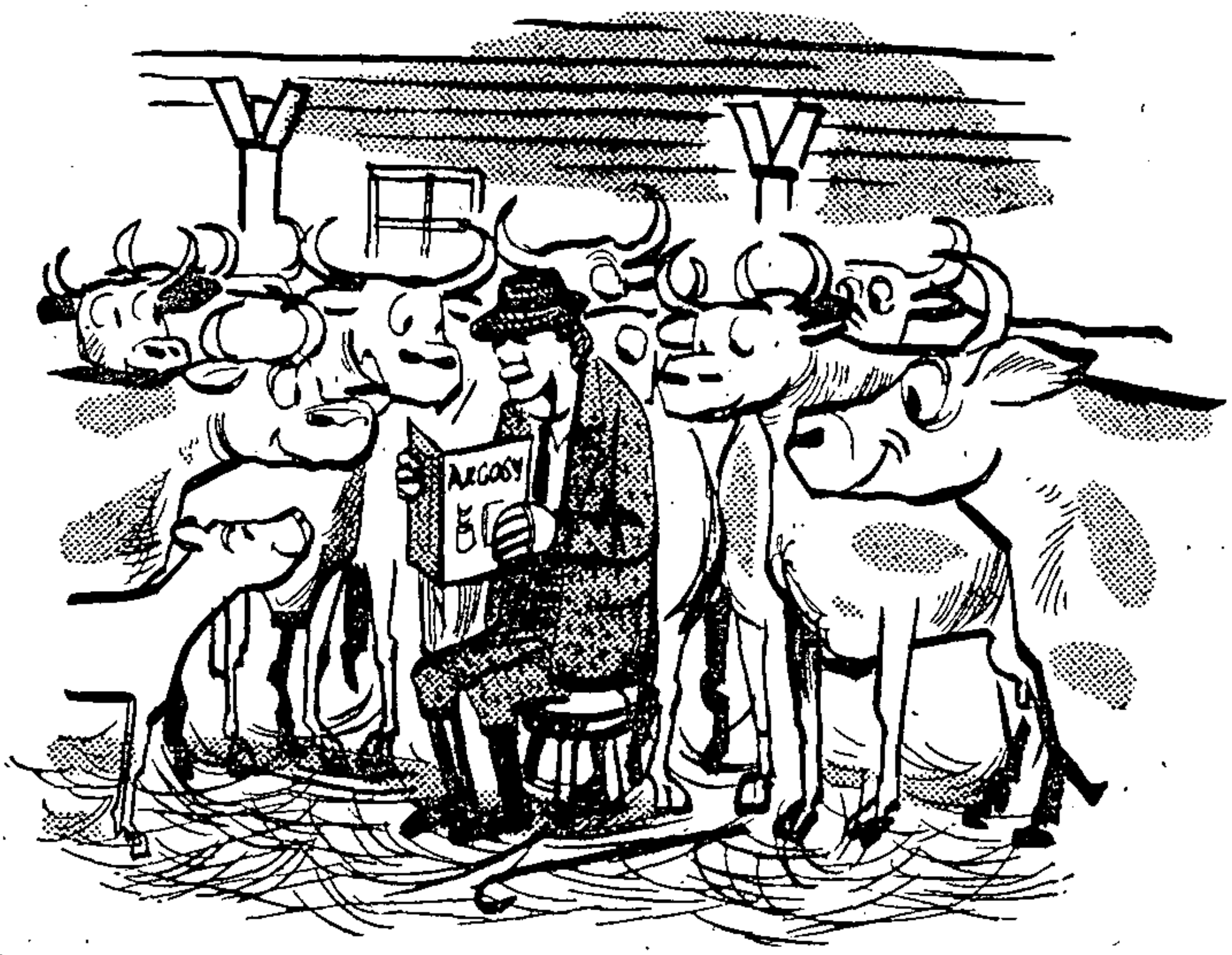
And so, every day after milking, Patrick settles down on his old three-legged stool with his herd clustered round, and he reads Argosy aloud to them while they chew the cud and ruminate. Ballybree Belle stops sucking her hoof, and the milk production goes up by leaps and bounds.

Argosy's favourite contributors are well to the fore with far-flung stories this month: Messrs. **Bradbury, Cloete,** and **Salt** transport you to Ireland, Africa, and the mysterious West Indies. We are also welcoming two new contributors.

Andrew Graham, known for his *Interval in Indo-China*, and a recent novel, *The Club*, was born in 1913, educated in Paris and Oxford. He began his professional career on the London Stock Exchange but after wartime and post-war service in the Welsh Guards became a Military Attaché and has obtained a diplomatic view of Beirut, Saigon, and Dien Bien Phu.

Harry Mark Petrakis is American, of Greek extraction, and writes, "I know the Greek immigrant in America in all his strange blending of dignity and pomposity." He attended a Greek school for eight years and says that he has tasted his quota of cold lamb and sharp cheese and heavy dark wine. A novel of his, *The Day of the Lion*, is due out in America next year.

JOHN SILVER



COLLISION OF MONDAY

Always ride on the wrong side—
it's safer, they say

BY RAY BRADBURY

THE man staggered through the flung-wide doors of Heber Finn's pub as if struck by lightning. Reeling, blood on his face, coat, and torn trousers, his moan froze every customer at the bar. For a time you heard only the soft foam popping in the lacy mugs, as the customers turned, some faces pale, some pink, some veined and wattle-red. Every eyelid down the line gave a blink.

The stranger swayed in his ruined clothes, eyes wide, lips trembling. The drinkers clenched their fists. Yes! they cried silently—Go on man, what *happened ?*

The stranger leaned far out on the air.

" Collision," he whispered. " Collision on the road."

Then, chopped at the knees, he fell.

" Collision! " A dozen men rushed at the body. Heber Finn vaulted the bar. " Collision, did ya hear? Kelly, get to the road! Mind the victims; easy does it! Joe, run for the Doc! "

" Wait," said a quiet voice.

From the private stall at the dark end of the pub, the cubby-hole where a philosopher might brood, a dark man blinked out at the crowd.

" Doc! " cried Heber Finn. " It's you! "

Doctor and men hustled out in the night.

" Collision." The man on the floor twitched his mouth.

" Softly, boys! " Heber Finn and two others gentled the victim atop the bar. He looked handsome as death on the fine inlaid wood, with the prismed mirror making him two dread calamities for the price of one.

Outside, on the steps, the crowd halted, shocked, as if an ocean had sunk Ireland in the dusk and now bulked all about them. Fog, in fifty-foot rollers and breakers, put out the moon and stars. Blinded, cursing, the men leapt out to vanish in the deeps.

Behind, in the bright door frame, a young man stood. He was neither red enough nor pale enough of face, nor dark enough or light enough in spirit to be Irish, and so must be American. He was.

That established, it follows he dreaded interfering with what seemed village ritual. Since his arrival in Ireland, he could not shake the feeling that at all times he was living centre-stage of the Abbey Theatre. Now, not knowing his lines, he could only stare after the rushing men.

"But," he protested uneasily, "I didn't hear any cars on the road."

"That you didn't!" said an old man, almost pridefully. Arthritis limited him to the bottom steps where he teetered, shouting at the white tides under which his friends had submerged. "Try the crossroads, boys! *That's* where it most often does!"

"The crossroads!" Far and near, footsteps rang.

"Nor," the American continued, "did I hear a collision."

The old man snorted with contempt. "Ah, we don't be great ones for commotion, nor great crashing sounds. But collision ya'll see if ya step out there. Walk, don't run! It's the devil's own night, and runnin' blind ya might hit Kelly, beyond, who's a great one for runnin' just to squash his lungs.

"Or you might head-on with O'Hoolihan, too drunk to find the road, no matter *what's* on it! You got a torch, a flash? You'll still be blind, but use it. Walk, now, ya *hear?*"

The American groped through the fog to his car, found his torch and, immersed in the night beyond Heber Finn's, made direction by the heavy clubbing of shoes, a rally of voices ahead.

A hundred yards off in eternity, the men approached, grunting whispers. "Easy now!" "Ah, the shameful blight!" "Hold on; don't jiggle him!"

The American was flung aside by the steaming lump of men who swept suddenly from the fog bearing atop themselves a crumpled object. He glimpsed a blood-stained and livid face high up there, then someone cracked his torch down.

By instinct, sensing the far whisky-coloured light of Heber Finn's, the procession surged on towards that fixed and familiar harbour.

Behind came dim shapes and a chilling insect rattle.

"Who's that?" cried the American.

"Us, with the vehicles," someone husked. "Ya might say—we got the collision . . ."

The torch fixed them; the American gasped. A moment later the battery failed.

But not before he had seen two village lads jogging along with no trouble at all, easily, lightly, toting under their arms two ancient black bicycles minus front and tail lights.

"What . . .?" said the American.

But the lads trotted off, the accident with them. The fog closed in. The American stood abandoned on an empty road, his torch dead in his hand.

By the time he opened the door at Heber Finn's, they had both bodies, as they called them, stretched long on the bar.

"We got the bodies on the bar," said the old man, turning as the American entered.

And there was the crowd lined up, not for drinks but blocking the way so the Doc had to shove sideways from one to another of these relics of blind driving by night on the misty roads.

"One's Pat Nolan," whispered the old man. "The other's Mr. Peevey from Maynooth; in sweets and cigarettes, mostly." Lifting his voice, "Are they dead now, Doc?"

"Wait a minute, won't ya!" The Doc resembled a sculptor troubled at finding some way to finish two full-length marble statues at once. "Here, let's put one victim on the floor!"

"The floor's a tomb," observed Heber Finn. "Leave 'em up where the warm air gathers from our talk."

"But," said the American quietly, confused, "I've never heard of an accident like this in all my life. Are you sure there were absolutely no cars? Only these two men on their bikes?"

"*Only?*" the old man shouted. "Man, a fella workin' up a drizzlin' sweat can pump along at thirty-five miles an hour, and with a long downhill, hit fifty or fifty-five. So here they come, no front or tail lights—"

"Isn't there a law about that?"

"To hell with government interference! So here they come, no lights, flyin' home from one town or the next, thrashin' as if Sin hisself's at their behinds, and—bang! both the same side of the road at the cross! Always ride the wrong side of the road; it's safer, they say. But look on these lads, fair destroyed by all that official safety palaver. One remembered it, the other didn't. Better if the officials kept their mouths shut, for here the two be, dyin' . . ."

"Dying?" The American stared.

"What stands between two able-bodied hell-bent men jumpin' along the path from Kilcock to Maynooth but fog to keep their skulls from bashin'? Why, look, when two chaps hit, it's like a strike in bowlin' alleys, ten pins flyin'! There go your friends, nine feet up, heads together like old chums met, flailin'

the air, their bikes clenched like two tom-cats. Then they all fall down and just lay there, feelin' around for Death."

"Surely, they won't—"

"Last year in all the Free State no night passed some soul did not meet in fatal collision with another . . ."

"You mean over three hundred Irish bicyclists . . ."

"God's truth and a pity."

"I never ride my bike nights." Heber Finn eyed the bodies. "I always walk."

"But then the damn bikes run ya down," said the old man. "Awheel or afoot, some idiot's always pantin' up Doom the other way at ya, and'd sooner split ya down the seam than wave hullo. Oh the brave men I've seen ruined, or half ruined, and headaches their lifetimes after."

The old man trembled, his eyelids shut. "Ya might almost think that humans was not made to handle such delicate instruments of power, now wouldn't ya?"

"Three hundred each year . . ." The American seemed dazed.

"Should we stand here talking?" He gestured helplessly towards the victims. "Is there a hospital?"

"On a moonless night," Heber Finn continued, "best walk in the middle of fields, away from the evil roads. That's how I've survived into my fifth decade!"

"Ah . . ." The men stirred restlessly.

The Doc, sensing he had withheld information too long, feeling his audience drift away, now snatched them back by straightening up and exhaling. "Well!"

The pub quickened to silence.

"This chap here—" the Doc pointed—"bruises, lacerations, and agonizin' backaches for two weeks runnin'. This *other* lad, though . . ." And here the Doc let himself scowl for a long moment at the paler one there, looking rouged, waxed, and ready for final rites. "Concussion."

"Concussion!"

The quiet wind rose and fell in the silence.

"He'll survive if we run him quick to Maynooth Clinic. Whose car will volunteer?"

The crowd turned as a staring body towards the American. He felt the gentle shift as he was drawn from outside the ritual to its deep and innermost core. He flushed, recalling the front of Heber Finn's pub; there was only one car parked there at the moment. Quickly, he remembered to nod.

"A volunteer! Men, now, hustle this lad—gently—to our good friend's vehicle!"

The men reached out to lift the body, but froze when the American coughed. They saw him circle his hand to all, and tip his cupped fingers to his lips. They gasped in soft surprise. The gesture was hardly done when drinks foamed down the bar. One for the road!

Now even the luckier victim, suddenly revived, found a mug gentled to his hand with whispers, "Here, lad, here—and tell us—what happened, eh?"

Then the body was gone off the bar; the potential wake over; the room empty save for the American, the Doc, the revived lad, and two softly cudgelling friends. Outside, you could hear the crowd putting the one serious result of the great collision into the volunteer's car.

The Doc said, "Finish your drink, Mr.—?"

"McGuire," said the American, far away.

"Irish, by the Saints!"

No, thought the American named McGuire, looking numbly round at the pub, at the recovered bicyclist seated waiting for the crowd to come back and mill about him; seeing the blood-spotted floor, the two bicycles tilted near the door like props from a vaudeville turn, the dark night waiting outside with its improbable fog; listening to the roll and cadence and gentle equilibrium of these voices balanced each in its own throat and environment.

No, thought the American named McGuire, almost but not quite Irish.

"Doctor," he heard himself say as he placed money on the bar, "do you often have auto wrecks, crashes and collisions between people in cars?"

"Not in our town." The Doc nodded scornfully east. "If ya like that sort of thing, now, Dublin's the very place for it!"

Crossing the pub together, the Doc took his arm as if to impart some secret which would change his Fates; and, thus steered, the American found the stout inside himself a shifting weight he must accommodate from side to side, as the Doc breathed soft in his ear.

"Look here, McGuire, admit it, ya've driven little in Ireland, right? Then, listen! Drivin' to Maynooth, fog and all, ya'd best take it fast! Raise a din! Scare the cyclists and cows off the pavement, both sides. If ya drive slow, ya'll creep up on and do away with dozens before they know what took 'em.

"And another thing: when a car approaches, douse your lights! Pass each other, lights out, in safety. Them devil's own lights 've put out more eyes and demolished more innocents than all of seein's worth.

"Is it clear, now? Two things: speed, and douse your lights when cars loom up."

At the door, the American nodded. Behind him, he heard the one victim settling easy in his chair, working the stout round on his tongue, thinking, preparing, beginning his tale. "Well, I'm on me way home, blithe as ya please, a-sailin' downhill, when . . ."

Outside in the car, with the other collision victim moaning softly in the back seat, but beginning to stir and look around, wondering where was *his* drink, by God! the Doc offered final advice. "Always wear a cap, lad. If ya want to walk nights on the road, that is. A cap'll save ya the frightful migraines should ya meet Kelly or Moran or somebody hurtlin' full tilt the other way, full of fiery moss and hard-skulled from birth. There's rules for pedestrians, too, ya see, in Ireland and, 'Wear a cap at night,' is number one!"

Without thinking, the American fumbled under the seat, extracted a brown tweed cap purchased in Dublin that day, and put it on. Adjusting it, he looked out at the dark mist boiling across the night.

He listened to the empty highway waiting for him ahead, quiet, quiet, quiet, but not quiet somehow, for hundreds of long, strange miles up and down all of Ireland; quiet and hushed and dim but *really* not any of these.

Then, taking a deep breath, he pressed the starter.

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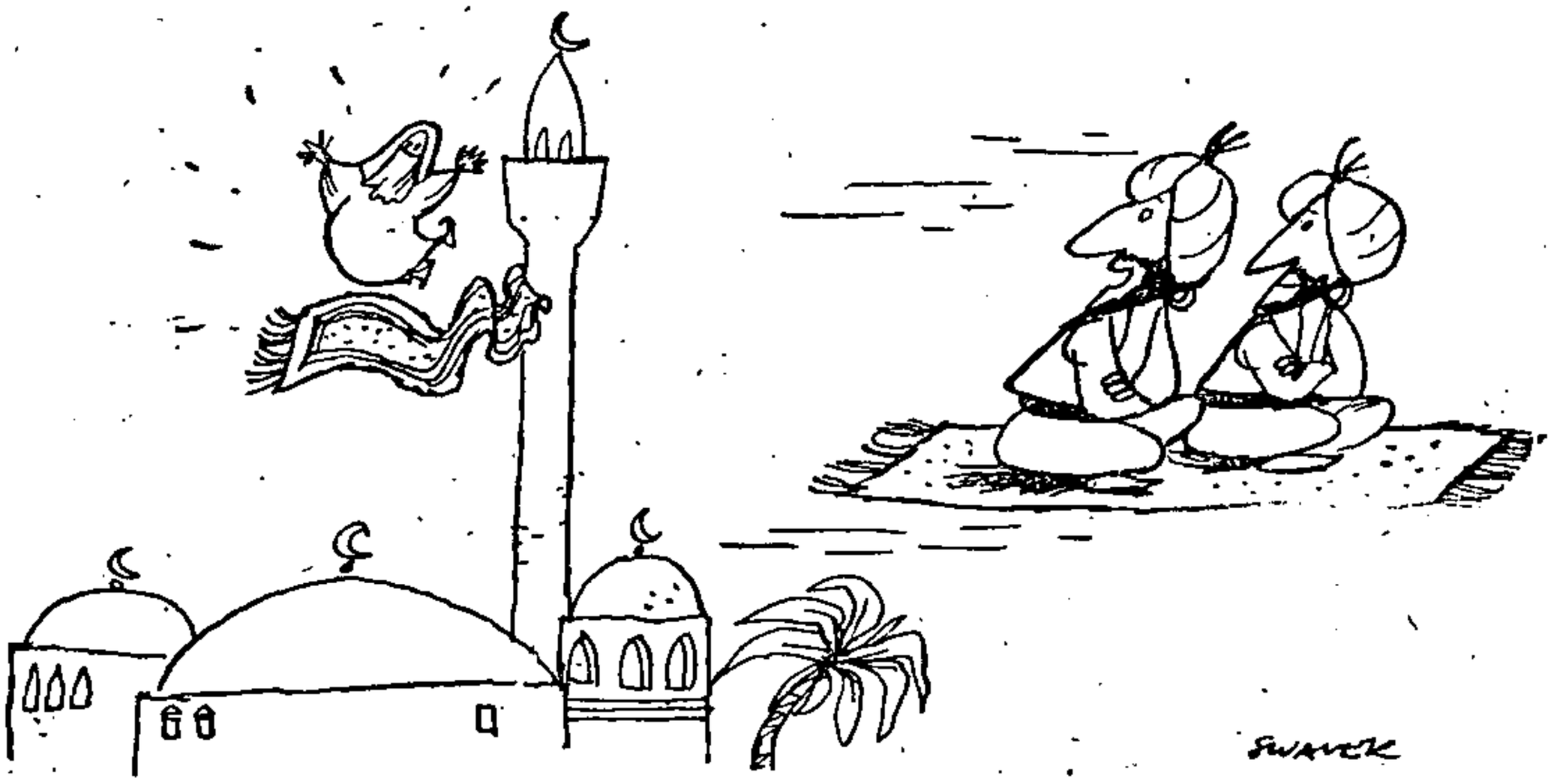

"Aha—a woman driver."

PICTURES IN THE FIRE

Their shadows swept in mad gyration
across the clearing

BY JOHN SALT

IAN MACRIMMON leaned with folded arms on the tall brass telegraph stand, quietly but comprehensively cursing both fate and the unfeeling harbour-master who had berthed the newly-painted *Clanrannoch* astern of a wide-bellied freighter loading bauxite. The greasy red dust was everywhere.

Across the wide harbour the buildings of Port of Spain quivered in the heat haze. His mind dwelt happily on the moment, some hours ahead, when the *Clanrannoch* would lift her hook from the mud and head out towards blue water.

He watched with approval as the deckhands replaced the final timbers on the forward hold and began to draw the weather tarpaulins over them and lash down.

A stoker came on deck in a shirt and denim slacks, mopping his face with a handful of waste that left cotton threads adhering to his stubble. Macrimmon gazed at him irritably; the *Clanrannoch* was expecting passengers and this was a poor advertisement. He shouted at the man to go back below, but the stoker stood his ground and signalled to him urgently.

Macrimmon glared at him, then clattered down the ladder to the deck. The stoker led the way aft to the engineer's quarters, and disappeared below deck. Macrimmon took his weight on his hands and lowered his six-foot length down the after hatch, hung for a second suspended, then let go of the hatch cover and lightly dropped the few inches to the cork-laid deck.

The door to the cabin of the Chief Engineer, Etienne Soubirail, was to his right and swinging wide. The stoker stood just inside the cubicle. Macrimmon thrust him aside, and looked down at the man lying in the bunk.

His eyes were wide and staring, the whites rolled over and back. The skin of his face was blue-white and scraped close to the bone, the mouth clamped tight, the jawline rigid and jutting. A slow shudder convulsed the lean body, passing like a

wave beneath the paper-frail tissue of skin, and heaving the cage of his ribs into prominence. Soubirail was breathing heavily through his nose. His hands gripped the edge of the blanket, the fingers twisting into talons.

Macrimmon put a hand on Soubirail's shoulder, shaking it gently. The flesh was cold as marble.

The stoker said gloomily, "You won't rouse him when he's like that."

"Has he had these attacks before?"

The man looked sheepish. "Never lasted so long. They seem to come on when he makes up his mind to go ashore."

"Was he thinking of going ashore this afternoon?"

The stoker nodded silently.

"But," Macrimmon exploded, "we're sailing at six. Why didn't some of you report it when the Chief fell ill?"

"Chief said we were to keep our mouths shut. He reckoned he had a touch of the sun."

"Damn it, man, that's not heat stroke; more like catalepsy. He might be a corpse lying there."

The stoker replied obstinately, "That's what he told us; and he's always right as rain when he comes to."

Macrimmon straightened up. "I'm going to tell the skipper. Keep an eye on him while we radio for a doctor."

Adam Ballantyne had his back to him when Macrimmon emerged on the bridge. A peaked cap set dead square covered the Captain's bald cranium, but the bright red hair of his tonsure escaped over either ear. His fat, powerful body was bent forward as he peered over the rail at the cargo party.

Macrimmon told him briefly what had happened; and then added, "He'll need to go ashore."

"Aye, so he will, then. But perhaps you'll be telling me where I shall find another Chief before the night tide flows."

Macrimmon shrugged. "I'll away on shore in the launch with Soubirail and see what I can find out at the harbour-master's office. There's maybe somebody wanting a berth."

Ballantyne nodded. "I'm thinking you'll have little luck. We'll have to spend another night in the Gulf and try to like it. What's the cargo situation?"

"Battened down, and there's steam on the boilers. We could be away the minute the passengers step aboard if Soubirail was fit. Any news of them, by the way?"

"They are alongside now; you'd best be down to meet them. I'm away to my cabin—I wouldn't be mentioning the wee bit of trouble we're having just at the moment."

By the time Macrimmon arrived the three passengers were

already on deck. There was Cyrus Rademacher, fat, middle-aged, and prosperous, but hot and uncomfortable in a tropical suit too heavy for June in Trinidad. There was Mrs. Rademacher in a picture hat, and a dress of shocking pink. And then there was Serena . . .

And since there was Serena, Macrimmon found little point in paying much more attention to her parents, beyond murmuring the conventional civilities.

Serena Rademacher was small and dark, with large brown eyes in an oval face. Her skin was matt and of a creamy texture, her mouth had a humorous twist, and her lips were full and red.

He could not stand there looking at her all afternoon, yet it seemed he might have done just that, but for the appearance of the stoker he had left with Soubirail. Macrimmon's troubles crowded back on him, but he managed a smile and stood politely to one side as Serena, with a curious, half-amused glance at him, slipped past to join her parents.

The stoker jerked his head, and the First Officer, following his glance, saw Soubirail a few paces away at the port rail, staring across the flat, oily water towards the blue-grey hills of Trinidad. Macrimmon walked towards the Engineer. "Are you all right, man?"

"It was the sun. I rested a while in my cabin." He spoke in the soft, breathy sing-song of the old French islands.

Macrimmon looked sceptical.

The Engineer shrugged gently. "I'm quite well now."

"You looked like a dead man half an hour ago."

"I may have looked worse than I really was."

"Well, never mind that now. You can go back ashore in the launch that brought the passengers."

Soubirail looked startled. "There's no need," he said swiftly. "I shall be at my post when we sail."

"That's damned nonsense," Macrimmon said. "You're not fit to stand a watch. The skipper told me to put you ashore; collect your gear and get below to the launch."

Soubirail gave him his patient smile. "I have been to see the Captain. He is quite satisfied that I am fit to sail."

Macrimmon stared at him uncertainly. "Do you mean that, Soubirail? Hadn't you better slip ashore for a quick check-up now? We'll wait the morning tide."

Soubirail looked again at the shore and his glance was sombre. "There is nothing they can do for me," he said. The words were simply spoken, but in them was a world of finality.

The *Clanrannoch* sailed through the Dragon's Mouth under a

white moon, making an elderly eight knots with the vibration of her single screw, and setting the glasses tinkling on the table as Ballantyne and Macrimmon sat at dinner with their passengers.

Papa Rademacher was a man of forceful phrase who brought the tones of the parade ground into most aspects of human society.

He turned on Macrimmon. "You, now," he barked. "What's your job? Second in command—something like that?"

Macrimmon admitted that he was the First Officer.

"Good, you can do a job for me. Look after my daughter, keep her out of my hair, will you? Show her round the ship. You can look after her when we touch port as well," he added with final magnanimity. "Any objections?"

Macrimmon said gravely that there were no objections. That having been decided, Mr. Rademacher waddled away to the door, pausing briefly on the threshold to bark at his wife, "Coming?"

Mrs. Rademacher rose with alacrity, smiled absent-mindedly at the company, and departed in the wake of her lord.

Macrimmon stared steadfastly at his plate, but Serena laughed aloud. "Pop's a character, isn't he?" she said.

Ballantyne set down his glass and twinkled at her.

"And what do you think of my ship, Miss Rademacher? We must get Macrimmon to show you over."

Serena said stoutly, "I think she's just fine."

The Captain was gratified but cautious. "Ah well, she's not as good as all that. But she'll take you where you're wanting to go, and that's all that matters. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'm away to relieve on the bridge."

The girl looked at Macrimmon ruefully. "Did I offend him?" she asked. "He seemed to go as suddenly as Pop."

"Not a bit. I'd say he's your friend for life. He loves this old tub." She watched him steadily.

"You're pretty fond of him, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I am."

And then all at once he was telling her about himself and Adam Ballantyne. How they had met, and on a gamble pooled their resources to take shares in the elderly but well-found *Clanrannoch*, and sail her on their first island cargo run. The ship was slow and the profit slender, but they had made out over the years by supplementing the rum and banana cargoes with an occasional passenger or two on the run from Trinidad by St. Lucia and Martinique to Cuba and the Florida Keys.

"Why are you sailing with us?" he asked her at last.

"Oh, Pop's been overdoing it, as usual, and somebody told him he'd find peace on a slow boat home to the States. Mother hates flying, so she's happy, too."

"And how do you like the idea?"

She gave him her candid look again. "Well, I wasn't too sure at first, but now I think I'm going to enjoy it."

A sudden deep and quite unreasonable joy flooded the heart of Ian Macrimmon. "I like fine to hear you say that," he said.

The *Clanrannoch* ploughed through blue water towards her landfall at Pierron des Isles, off the main steamer track. It was in Havredieu, on the main island, that Ballantyne had recruited his Chief Engineer, Etienne Soubirail. He remarked on the fact to Macrimmon as they stood together on the bridge during their second night out from Trinidad.

"What do you make of his illness?" asked Macrimmon.

"It has little enough to do with the sun."

"What is it then, some form of petit mal?"

The Captain laughed shortly. "Grand mal, since you're asking. But nothing the doctors can treat." Ballantyne puffed ruminatively at his pipe, then shot a question through the wreathing blue smoke. "What do you know about obeah?"

"I've heard of it and that's all."

"Just so; my own case precisely. You'll be hearing more about it in some places than in others, and there's usually a tale or two out of Haiti. I'm thinking yon Soubirail is in that sort of trouble—to my mind somebody has put the wish on him."

"The wish?" Macrimmon asked sceptically.

"That's what they call it in Havredieu. There's an auld witch-wife there by the name of Maman Bocage who sells love potions and the like. She may have a hand in it."

"But for what reason?"

"You know Soubirail has a wife in Havredieu? He's fond of her, for all he's a rascally seafaring man the like of yourself. Celeste has come into a bit of property."

"She wants him ashore, you mean?"

"I dare say she does, but that's not the reason. You see, property is highly regarded in the island. It's a poor enough piece of land, a wee sweet-potato patch, with a bit of a tumble-down bungalow. Soubirail is wild to sell and get rid of it, but there are uncles and cousins, sisters and brothers—all Celeste's kin, who'd see him dead before he sold a foot of it. It's hallowed ground to them, d'ye see? Full of the graves of their forebears, with maybe a couple of ancient shades whickering round o' moonlit nights."

"Do you believe all this—seriously, I mean?"

"Well, maybe not with a sober mind, but they believe it and that's what counts. Soubirail planned to sell up, and Celeste

was coming aboard for the trip to the States and back. Then they were going to settle in Trinidad and raise a family."

"What's to stop him?"

"Nothing, except the uncles and the cousins I was telling you about. And maybe Maman Bocage, who has been sending him a few warnings on this trip."

"What sort of warnings?"

Ballantyne said deliberately, without looking at his friend, "Pictures in the fire."

"In the furnace fires?"

"In the mind's eye. What sort of pictures they are, he won't be telling."

"You have been talking to him?"

"Most of what I'm telling you I got from him."

"And the pictures?"

"A warning, as I said. Just a couple of gentle reminders of what might happen if he were to shove off ashore somewhere and wish his ancestors a sailor's farewell. And they were slaves, don't be forgetting."

Macrimmon was brought up short, remembering the words of the stoker telling him how the Engineer's last attack had begun. He bent over the compass card, then peered at Ballantyne curiously, his face half shadowed, half irradiated by the greenish glow from the binnacle lamp. "What do you make of it, Adam?"

The Captain smoked reflectively for a moment before replying.

"My father was at the fishing years gone by and me with him. The auld wives had a song in those days, a kind of herring proverb:

The moon is roun', the moon is fair,
The fush gae doon frae Troon tae Ayr.
The moon is fair, the moon is roun',
The fush gae back frae Ayr to Troon.

"It's great nonsense, to be sure, but that's the way the fish would go muddling about, as I can tell you from long hours of peering at them from my perch in the bows, and there's no one man can explain just why. And that's the only answer I can give."

"It's not very precise."

"Maybe it's not, but I'll tell you this. We're making for Maman's home island. If Soubirail goes ashore there and doesn't come back, it's not for the likes of you to dive after him and mix yourself in matters that neither you nor I understand. A lowland conscience is no match for the de'il in his own country, and I have no wish to pipe Macrimmon's Lament on my foredeck."

Pierron des Isles is a group of three islands, with the home

island in the centre and Pierrette slightly astern and to the north. The smallest of the islands—a mere rock named Grand Pierre, with the happy perversity of the early navigators—sits plumb in the fairway, a mile off Havredieu, the seaport of Pierron.

The *Clanrannoch* dropped anchor soon after first light, while the morning sun was still drawing pale mist from land and water. A dozen row-boats came alongside at once, their occupants clamorous with offerings of fruit and fish.

Macrimmon clambered down to the deck and joined Serena at the port rail, gazing with her at the white town that surged along the waterfront and climbed in staggered terraces to the wooded heights. A narrow, dirt road wound through the town and up into the trees, vanishing at last over a saddleback pass between twin peaks.

"What do you think of Havredieu?"

Serena was breathless with delight. "It's just like a doll's village in the sun. And what a lovely name, the harbour of God. How long shall we stay?" she asked eagerly.

"About twenty-four hours; we don't collect much here."

"Can I go ashore?"

"Of course—you can bathe, play tennis, go surfing, dance, anything you please."

"Sounds wonderful, but what about you?"

"Today I'm a working man, lady. But my evenings are free."

The day's wait lengthened into three. By then Soubirail had been missing for forty-eight hours. Nobody had seen him slip ashore, and Ballantyne's call at the Engineer's home had met with failure. Celeste could not tell him where her husband might be.

"I was a fool to let him sail," the Captain admitted. "I should have waited for a new man in Port of Spain. I'll need to send a cable now, and that means we'll be held up here for another week at least."

"Shall we report it to the police ashore?"

"I've done that; they are not very interested. The general idea is that he is on a spree and will roll back, sick and sorry, in a day or so. They made a few half-hearted inquiries."

Macrimmon said carefully, "What about the other business?"

Ballantyne clamped his teeth on the stem of his pipe. "They laughed at me," he admitted. "But I'm not sleeping so well, thinking about it, just the same."

Macrimmon went off to find Serena. They discovered a battered and barely roadworthy car at a garage in Havredieu, and spent the next two days touring the island.

Macrimmon stopped one noon, at Serena's bidding, in the

shade of tall trees on the brow of the saddleback pass. Behind them lay the tiny houses of Havredieu with the toy *Clanrannoch* in the harbour; below lay the distant coastline, with the shallow waves washing the white sand of Pierrette.

Macrimmon was busy unpacking a picnic basket. He answered absent-mindedly when Serena asked him where the overgrown footpath led that wandered off among the dark trees. The girl had been gone some moments before he missed her. He jumped from the car and ran along the path.

Serena stood on a crumbling stone wall that had once formed part of a garden terrace. Before her an open space sloped gently downhill; to one side lay blackened ruins of brick and timber, with here and there a marble pillar or a giant beam of mahogany twisted and splintered as if in some great conflagration. Irrigation courses choked by cane and bush patterned the clearing, and at the far end an overturned statue crumpled in the scummed expanse of an ornamental pool. A keskidee chattered in the ruins of the château; something dry and scaly moved underfoot and scuttled away into the bush.

Beyond these small sounds all was brooding silence and steaming heat in a strange desolation.

Macrimmon touched the girl's shoulder and felt her start violently. "Come away," he said gently. "This is not a good place." She obeyed, still trembling as he led her to the car.

On the way back to Havredieu he told her of the time, a hundred and fifty years ago, when the settlers had been foolish and the slaves hungry, how hatred had sprung up and endured until the night when the indigents rose in their fury and gutted the plantations, slaughtering the slave-owners and putting their châteaux to the flames. There were many such relics in Pierron des Isles, and the horror of that night was unforgotten.

Serena nodded. "I could feel it there," she told him simply. "All that hate and all that hopelessness. Ian, this is not a happy island; it is beautiful only on the surface."

"It is old and poor," he comforted her. "The minds of people here turn back to old ways better forgotten."

This brought him to the problem of Etienne Soubirail . . .

Aboard *Clanrannoch* he found Ballantyne quarrelling on the same subject with Hans Wetterling, the German physician whose self-appointed and thankless task was the medical care of the inhabitants of Havredieu. As Macrimmon entered the cabin Ballantyne snarled at the doctor, "Celeste Soubirail is nothing to do with me. The sick are your concern."

The doctor, ecstatic with fury, beat his plump little arms in the air and shouted back, "And I tell you she is not sick, Captain

Ballantyne; melancholic, certainly, but not sick. The woman is crazy with worry, I tell you. And she is without means.

"Soubirail is in your employ, and he has vanished. The woman does not know what to do, and I am too busy to care for her. She tells me her husband promised she should sail in your ship and that now you will not take her." Fury suddenly convulsed him again and he rounded on Ballantyne. "Why do you put me to this trouble?" he stormed.

Suddenly Ballantyne's manner changed. "It's a hot day to quarrel, doctor," he said mildly, and thrust a glass of whisky into Wetterling's hand. "I was about to say that my First Officer, Mr. Macrimmon here, will step ashore and have a word with the lady."

Wetterling adjusted tiny gold spectacles on the bridge of his nose, clicked his heels, and gave a stiff little bow. He drew in and expelled a deep breath. "Lieber Gott, such relief. Thank you, Captain. There is just one thing .... There is a young lady passenger on your ship, I think?"

Macrimmon nodded, his attention caught. "Miss Rademacher. What about her?"

"If I may suggest it, you should take her with you. Celeste Soubirail is in a state of nervous tension and she may not trust you at first. The sight of another woman may calm her nerves."

He turned again to Ballantyne, "I must repeat, Captain, that I consider Celeste Soubirail to be your responsibility until her husband's return."

Macrimmon struck in swiftly with a question, "Can you tell us anything about the woman who is known as Maman Bocage, Doctor Wetterling?"

The doctor drew himself up stiffly. "Indeed, I cannot. I do not associate with witch-doctors, and if you take my advice, neither should you. And now, permit me to leave."

Ballantyne watched the doctor's fat legs carry him up out of view, then said to Macrimmon, "Try to get her aboard if you can. She wouldn't come for me, but I've an idea she might be safer here. Do you think Miss Rademacher will go with you?"

Macrimmon grinned. "I dare say she'd go anywhere rather than stay cooped up in the saloon with Papa. Wish us luck."

Celeste lived in a small, pink-washed house on the quayside. The door was unlatched and they went in. At first the house seemed deserted but Serena, exploring a darkened room, found the girl sitting silently in a chair pushed into a far corner. The room was stifling.

Macrimmon walked to the window and pushed the wooden

shutters wide; the late sun flooded the bare room with red and gold. He turned to look at Celeste Soubirail.

She was young and probably very pretty, but that was hard to tell, for when an island girl loses joy she sometimes loses her beauty, too. Her face was now a muddy grey, the skin thickened and rough like the surface of coarse paper. Her frightened eyes were downcast on her lap, where her small, bony hands worked ceaselessly at what had once been a headscarf, but was now no more than a blackened length of string, full of tiny knots drawn tight with the strength of despair.

Macrimmon introduced himself briefly. She listened with no word of reply while he repeated the questions Ballantyne had asked her earlier that week. The room filled with shadows as the sun dipped into the sea. Macrimmon lit the leaking hurricane lamp standing in a tin tray on the table. He made a business of rattling the lamp glass down on its wire runners, then said sharply, " Is your gear packed? "

The unexpected question startled her into sullen reply. "Ain't going no place, man."

Macrimmon said quietly, " But you are supposed to be coming back to Trinidad with us; you know that. And Etienne will expect to find you on board."

She paused uncertainly; one hand left the twisted scarf and went to her lower lip. She shot a suspicious glance at Serena. " Why for you bring the white dolly girl here, man? " she demanded of Macrimmon.

" Miss Rademacher is a passenger; she would like to help you," he answered stiffly.

" You going to marry up with she? "

Macrimmon felt his face burning slowly brick-red. Celeste spoke to Serena. " What you saying 'bout it, dolly girl? "

Serena answered calmly, " Nobody has asked me that question yet. There's no saying what will happen."

" You saying true words, dolly girl," Celeste said gloomily. " Ain't nothing safe nor sure from crib to coffin in this old world today." And then quite suddenly the tension went out of her. She slumped down across the table with her head on her arms, her thin body shaken with wild sobs.

Serena knelt down before her and gently pulled the woman's hands away from her face. " Listen," she said quietly. " What would you give to save your husband? "

Celeste stared at her miserably. " Most all the world, dolly girl."

" Then why not tell us where you think he is? We are your friends, we want to help you."

Celeste shook her head. "Ain't no help you can give."

"So you will let him suffer alone with no one to save him," Serena said cruelly, rising to her feet.

Celeste clutched at the girl's skirt and rocked herself forward in an agony of grief and fear. "They took him to Pierrette four days past," she whispered at last. "That ole Mam' Bocage and the rest of them. They done took him. She Queen on that ole island; ain't nobody stay there now but she. Tonight they go sing his song."

"The island is a tangle of bush," Macrimmon broke in roughly. "Tell me where on Pierrette."

The woman screamed at him, "I can't do that, man. Can't you see I crazy scared?"

Macrimmon said inexorably, "You must tell me or take me there yourself."

There was a moment of heavy silence, then Celeste raised her head and gave Macrimmon a look, half fearful, half sly. "I'll take you, man, if the dolly girl comes too. Take yo' choice."

"That's impossible." Macrimmon spoke with finality. "Miss Rademacher will go back to the ship and tell the Captain what has happened. He will return here with a party and we will take you over the hill to Pierrette."

Celeste watched him with hard eyes. "I done said my last word," she said evenly.

Serena broke in, "I don't think we have very much time, Ian. We must do as she says. I'll come with you."

Macrimmon looked at her uncertainly. "I don't like it."

"I'm not exactly crazy about the idea myself, but I think we have to try."

Macrimmon made up his mind. "All right, then, we'll get back to the ship and collect a party. You should be safe enough."

"No," Celeste said sharply. "Ain't no time to get your men. Ole moon in the clouds now, but when that swim out Mam' Bocage go sing for my man. And when she go sing, it already too late to save him."

Macrimmon felt the monstrous urgency of her haste and fear, and he hesitated no longer. "Come on, then," he shouted. "The car is outside—we'll leave a message on the way up."

With Serena beside him and Celeste crouched shivering on the back seat, he drove furiously to the town's only sizeable hotel and stopped the car outside in a cloud of dust. Leaving the women in the car he rushed inside to telephone to police headquarters at Government House, four miles outside Havredieu.

Beyond Havredieu the road ceased to be anything better than a pot-holed dirt track snaking round the wooded contours of the

mountain. The radiator of the ancient car was jetting steam by the time he reached the crest of the saddleback. He stopped the car there for a moment to let the engine cool. Both women sat silently, their eyes fixed on the path that wound off among the trees towards the ruined château.

The moon swam out from a wrack of hurrying cloud; below them, the road switchbacked down to the sea, and Pierrette loomed darkly just offshore. As he started the engine again and roared down the mountain, Macrimmon prayed that the island ferry would be beached on the nearer shore.

A hardcore track crossed the beach, and the ferry—a great raft of mortised logs—bumped gently against the stake to which it was secured. Macrimmon drove the car on to the logs and locked his brakes fast. There was no sign of the ferryman, so he and Serena took up the long sweeps and began to pole out towards Pierrette. The water was not more than a few feet deep, but they were exhausted by the time the raft nudged the farther shore.

Macrimmon made fast and drove across the narrow beach into the shadow of the land. There he stopped the car again and leaned into the back to shake Celeste.

"Get out," he commanded. "Where to now?"

She struggled to obey him. He helped her out on to the sand, but there her legs gave way and she collapsed in a heap. "Ain't no use, man," she moaned. "I crazy scared, ain't in me to take you no farther."

The sailor picked her up and dumped her unceremoniously back in the car. "All right, then we'll take it from here. Just give me a bearing."

"There's a track just to yo' left, man. You follow dat to a hut. If she ain't dere you just follow the drums. And you got to hurry, man; ole moon come soon."

Macrimmon gave his hand to Serena and together they toiled up the rock-strewn gully. Halfway he halted and stood listening.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"I don't know. There it is again, faintly on the wind. What do you make of it?"

She said uncertainly, "It sounds like drums and faint singing, but it could be just the surf on the other side of the island."

The sailor shook his head. "I'm not sure."

A broader track opened before them and the going was easier. Presently they stumbled through a cultivated patch in which stood a corrugated-iron shack. Macrimmon pushed at the sagging door. It gave to him. Inside, the air was stifling. The embers of a fire glowed in one corner of the dirt floor and the reek of charcoal blended with odours less easily identified.

"They were here not long ago," Macrimmon called. "The fire is still burning."

"I think there's another burning out there," Serena answered him, with a very definite quaver in her voice. Macrimmon joined her and saw at once the deepening glow which had begun to light the sky above the trees.

"This is where you turn back," he told her firmly. "I don't know what's going on up there, but it's not likely to be very pleasant, and you'll be more use at the car with Celeste. She'll give you a hand back with the raft when the others arrive."

Serena shook her head. "I've come so far, I'm going to see it through now," she told him.

The glow grew brighter and now the fire itself could be seen at intervals in among the trees. At last the moon slid out from the cloud wrack and the drums grew deeper, more insistent, as the sing-song chant came strongly on the breeze. The bush was flooded with the moon's clear white light.

Macrimmon pulled Serena swiftly into the trees. They crept forward towards the edge of a vast clearing of hard-trampled earth, and found a vantage point behind a fallen tree . . .

The scene before them was bizarre but orderly. Some two dozen men and women in masks of skin formed a loose circle about the central fire. Before the fire itself rested a catafalque of boughs flanked by six figures, holding lighted tapers.

On the far side of the fire a scarecrow, clad in a dress coat and silk hat, had been planted.

Behind that again, grotesque in a wing-sided Victorian armchair, sat Maman Bocage, the high priestess of the rite. She was tiny and very old; on her fingers many rings glinted in the firelight; and on her head towered a wreath of green branches, many-leaved and pagoda-like. At her feet sat three drummers. About them was piled more greenery, and small offerings of fruit and food were ranged in parallel rows of equal height.

With the rising of the moon the singing and the drumming had built up to a tremendous diapason. In the swell of the barbaric music was something savage and animal. The ordered cacophony beat in on Macrimmon's brain; he felt his senses reeling, until the tempo slowed and the voices and the drums became muted but none the less insistent in their challenge.

In the close darkness of the friendly trees Macrimmon felt for Serena's hand and took it reassuringly.

"How goes it?" he whispered.

"Scared. What happens now?"

He shook his head. "I don't know—and I don't think they

do, either. The hellion in the greenery is bossing this show. They'll take their cue from her."

A silence had fallen upon the celebrants in the clearing. Macrimmon's pressure on her hand warned Serena not to speak again. The sailor craned his neck back and looked up at the moon. The pack of cloud had fled, and the night sky was dark-blue velvet with a penumbra about the white orb. The clearing was lit more brightly than by day. Macrimmon could see the lean, beaked profile of Soubirail, lying on the catafalque. The silence endured a full minute longer.

Two bushes sprang apart on the far side of the clearing. A giant of a man wearing a goat mask burst through, half dragging, half carrying the body of a woman. The worshippers began to chatter like monkeys, but Maman Bocage silenced them with a single imperious gesture and rose to examine her disciple's burden.

Macrimmon passed his tongue over dry lips. "This is no longer amusing," he muttered. "They have found Celeste."

Serena caught a hand to her mouth. "Somebody was watching when we landed?"

"Let's hope not. She may have stumbled up here on her own and walked into a guard."

"Suppose she tells them about us."

"You stole my thought. She looks too far gone to do any talking, though. Keep low; even if she does talk they still have to find us."

Maman Bocage spoke sharply. The guard dragged Celeste to her feet. But the woman's legs were made of rubber and she hung limply in his arms, her head sagging on her chest. The old witch cackled, and struck Celeste across the face with the horse-hair switch she wore suspended from one wrist. The guard let her fall again, then dragged her behind the witch's chair and resumed his place in the circle.

There was a moment of aching suspense for Macrimmon. Maman Bocage sat down again in her chair, and at her signal the drums began once more their muted throbbing. Sweat ran down into Macrimmon's eyes and made them sting. He drew in a deep breath. "So far, they don't know we are here."

The men and women in the outer circle swayed gently from side to side; their shadows swept in mad gyration across the floor of the clearing and the branches and leaves of the surrounding trees. The old witch began to chant in a piping treble with the descant borne by the outer circle of worshippers.

But, as the sailor and the girl watched, the beldame fell silent and a new chant was taken up by the six taper bearers grouped about Soubirail's bier. One by one they set their torches in the

earth. Their song rose thin, high, and terrible as they closed in on the catafalque. The chant was in pidgin French; Macrimmon strained to catch the words.

Voici un corps mort, raide comme un arbre sec,
Noir comme les cieux de nuit.
Que faire, Maman? Dites-nous les enfants.

The verse, three times repeated, rose to a climax, and still the figures converged upon the catafalque.

Macrimmon tightened his grip on the girl's arm and whispered urgently, "We must break this up before it goes too far. Get to the beach as fast as you can and pole that ferry back. The police should have crossed the pass by now but they'll be stranded without the raft. You must hurry them; seconds count. Think you can manage it?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I haven't the least idea," he lied.

"I can't leave you, Ian."

Macrimmon said sternly, "It doesn't need two of us to watch this jamboree. Off with you."

She leaned forward and kissed him hard; suddenly she was gone. For a while he heard the careful sound of her departing steps, and then all his attention was riveted on the scene in the clearing.

"*Que faire, Maman?*" the singers wailed again. "*Que faire?*"

The ancient witch rose, weirdly tall in her swaying head-dress of boughs. Her scream pierced a deep silence as the worshippers bowed their heads before her. "Lev'lon," Maman Bocage moaned. "Lev'lon, mes enfants, au nom du grand Baron Diable."

The chant quickened at once into calypso time with the whole group dancing, the outer circle leaping and capering into and out of the firelight.

Voici un corps mort, raide comme un arbre sec,
Froid comme la lune silencieuse—

A roll from the drums, a great shout—"Lev'lon, lev'lon, lève l'un et l'autre." The six converged at once on the bier, each with index finger extended, lifting Soubirail and raising him high. He was stiff and stark beneath the white moon, and rested only upon the fingertips of the six men beneath. Slowly they swayed with him towards the top-hatted scarecrow effigy of Baron Diable, the guardian of graveyards, while Maman Bocage whimpered and capered her delight.

In Macrimmon's ears was the pounding clamour of machinery and the rush of a great wind. Then he was on his feet and moving

fast, in and out among the dancing men and women. One great goathead blocked his path. Macrimmon checked his step and punched hard for the man's throat; he went down with a gasping yelp. Macrimmon jumped over him. Now he stood immediately behind the shrieking witch-wife, as the body of Soubirail swayed towards her.

Alarm dawned in the faces of the two foremost bearers. Macrimmon put an armlock round the neck of Maman Bocage and bore her to the earth.

Then the night went mad as a juggernaut of flaring light and smoking metal tore into the clearing and swerved wildly towards the fire. Embers scattered in a shower of smoke and sparks. The clearing rang with shouts and screams and shook with the passage of panicking feet. Soubirail's bearers glared wildly round, then dropped their burden and fled.

Macrimmon wrestled in the choking dust with the engine of whipcord and wire that was Maman Bocage. Having at length subdued her, he sat down on her bony chest with a grunt of satisfaction.

The car had stalled a few feet away and Serena was walking unsteadily towards him.

"Name your medal," he said gratefully. "At one point I thought you were Baron Diable himself, calling to claim his own."

She shuddered. "Don't joke about it. I dreaded what I might find when I got back here."

"You disobeyed orders," he reminded her.

"I don't take orders," she flared back. "Where is Celeste?"

"Don't worry about her, she's looking after her husband."

"Oh Ian, I thought he might be dead."

"No; I'd seen him like that once before. Just a few spells and some noxious herbs from Maman here, and the rest was done by mirrors, I suppose." He looked down at the old woman and two evil eyes stared unwinkingly back.

He allowed her to get to her feet. "The great Baron Diable let you down pretty badly tonight, I'm thinking."

Maman Bocage twisted her head and spat at him. Macrimmon grinned at her almost affectionately in the relief of the moment. The old woman stood sullen before him. He spoke to her in a voice that was quiet and deadly.

"I'm just a poor, ignorant sailor, but I'll tell you this for the good of your skin. Any more games like tonight's and I'll arrange to have you put away long enough to see you under ground. As it is, there are certain men who will come from Government House very soon, so your explanation had better be good. Now go on, imshi, vamoose, scat."

Maman Bocage stared at him for a long moment, her scalding eyes searching his face to read the truth in his words. Then she turned and ran, her rags streaming behind her, the green branches toppling from her head. And with her passing the clouds swam again across the moon and the headlamps of the car gave the only illumination in the grove.

Soubirail came slowly across to Macrimmon.

"You cannot beat her," he said. "Not here in these islands where she is Queen."

"Queen of moonshine and nightmares," Macrimmon said grimly. "You are a grown man; she cannot harm you if you will not have it so. It is over, Etienne; forget it. By tomorrow you will be far away and there will be no more pictures in the fire." He turned to Serena and Celeste.

"Come along now, all of you, we've got to beat it back to the ferry before the others get over their scare and head in the same direction."

The lights of a jeep halted them on the shore of Pierron. Macrimmon spoke rapidly to the olive-skinned lieutenant of police, lolling behind the wheel, who nodded when he had finished.

"It is always so, too late again. We shall wait here and pick up a few as they come ashore, but you can be sure they will have a good tale to tell."

Macrimmon said sharply, "But you have four witnesses."

The policeman said sadly, "Have I, monsieur? What do you think you saw, and how will it seem in the light of day? Moreover, I understand that your ship sails at dawn. Would you care to stay here while the judicial hearing drags on?"

Macrimmon shook his head decidedly.

The policeman gave him a tired, lop-sided smile. "Eh bien, monsieur, voilà tout. I am happy, ladies, that no harm has come to you."

"No harm—" Macrimmon began violently, but the policeman calmed him with a languid wave of his hand.

"It is easily seen, monsieur, that you do not live in these islands. And so I will wish you good night and bon voyage."

Macrimmon crashed in the gears and drove for a while in angry silence. Serena said quietly, "What would they have done to him, Ian?"

"I don't know," he answered in a slow, puzzled voice. "Maybe nothing at all; perhaps it was all mumbo-jumbo. The old ways are dying, Serena, but they die hard, and the customs linger when folk have forgotten their meaning."

"Maman Bocage knew."

"Yes, she knew, but her days are ending, too, and will soon be done." Macrimmon put his free arm about her. "Were you very scared?"

"Horribly," she admitted. "But I had to do it."

"You are a young woman of parts," said Ian Macrimmon with a lowland pomposity which did its best, but failed hopelessly, to conceal the momentous discovery that he was head over heels in love.

"Are you going to look after me for the rest of the voyage?" she asked him.

"I am that," Macrimmon replied with deep conviction.

"I'm so glad," she said quietly.

And there the story ends, apart from a circumstance which Macrimmon never found himself able to mention to either Ballantyne or Serena.

In that last wild moment before he launched himself among the howling dancers towards Maman Bocage he had seen a picture in the fire: a giant image, limned in flame and smoke. The image of that weird, tatterdemalion guardian of the dead, whom the people of Pierron name Baron Diable, and to whom, on certain moonlit nights, when the forebears of the Yoruba walk abroad, their frightened children sing.

© John Salt 1958

★ ★ ★

OBTUSE ANGLES

I have always remembered a sentence that occurred in an elementary manual of conversation which I used in Japan: "Is this purple pencil convenient?" Not really a thing one would often want to say.

And there is a wonderful sentence in a nineteenth century phrase book for English travellers in Portugal, or Portuguese travellers in England: "Bring me a wand and some hooks, I wish to angle."

As I had "done" Greek for a year or two at school . . . we managed fairly well in a simple way, but when we were together, and in need of some particular colloquial phrase, our little book used to fall open at the sentence "She is always well dressed."

When we wanted to inquire about a journey to Mistra, we found "Are their nieces tired?"

And trying to work out a complaint to a laundry we came upon "If you had heard Mrs. B. you would almost have fainted with delight."

WILLIAM PLOMER, *At Home*

STRIP TEASE

Eventually curiosity got the better of me

BY ANDREW GRAHAM

CORPORAL MITCHUM was the battalion sign-writer. With the aid of stencils he made neat notices saying, "Guard Room," "Ablutions," or "Q.M. Store," and occasionally, as a treat, he executed the regimental device free-hand and in primary colours.

In his leisure hours he drew fairly good caricatures of odd-shaped officers like myself, elegant officers like the Adjutant and, of course, of the Regimental Sergeant Major. Little balloons on strings issued from our lips, and inside the balloons were fearfully funny remarks about haircuts, idleness, or potato-peeling. A cartoon by Corporal Mitchum had once appeared in *Soldier Magazine*, and this—or so I thought—was the high watermark of his artistic output.

It was therefore with considerable surprise that, one afternoon in a rest-area in Normandy in 1944, I came upon him sitting on a tree-stump with his back to me, quizzing the view of poplars and a pool and a crumbly little Norman cottage, dipping a camel-hair brush into an army mug at his side, and transferring his impressions on to the page of a sketchbook on his knee. His head was slightly cocked to one side, he was humming to himself, and he was obviously very happy.

I watched, fascinated, knowing that if I approached, he would see me and then, because he was a corporal and I an officer, he would have to stop what he was doing and stand smartly to attention until such time as I chose to tell him to carry on.

Eventually curiosity got the better of me. I walked up to him. We went through the correct ritual.

"I didn't know you painted, Corporal Mitchum. Would you mind very much if I had a look?"

I looked: and for a moment I was completely at a loss. What was it that I had discovered?

Patently this was not a finished masterpiece, and it wasn't, thank goodness, a potential "picture of the year." On the other hand it was indubitably very good indeed; it was in the great tradition. He knew exactly what he was doing with his poplars

and his pool and his broken-down cottage; and, as if circumstances were conspiring in his favour, a peasant woman with a red scarf really had come down to the water's edge, and he had popped her into the picture as she has been popped into how many hundreds of pictures that have gone before.

For me one of the most hideous things about war was that I hardly ever got a chance to look at a picture of any quality. That dousing of the divine spark—specifically not letting inspiration fire the clay of which we are made—seems to me as diabolical as any of the more conventional horrors.

And here, turning his back for a moment on three-tonners and mobile kitchen-equipment and the latrine-screens and all the rest of the prosaic paraphernalia of camp life, was Corporal Mitchum apparently in direct receipt of that intangible essence which is called inspiration, which makes an artist, if only for a moment, out of a craftsman. It was, to say the least of it, very remarkable.

We chatted.

Yes, he had attended drawing and painting classes run by the local authority; he wanted, more than anything, to be an artist; he had a job in a factory which made surgical appliances, and he had painted on Sundays, before he joined the Regiment.

I didn't say much, but I thought to myself, If we both survive, here is a chap for whom something *must* be done. He didn't seem to have any inkling of how good he was.

We both survived. Indeed Mitchum was promoted Sergeant. And eventually, almost within sight of the Rhine, we were told that we were to be replaced by another battalion, and sent home.

It was by now March 1945, we were in billets near Nijmegen, the buds were just beginning to show green, I heard a woodwren sing one morning and, in the intervals of drinking rather too much gin and water out of horrid little thick tumblers, there was time to think.

Back in England I would be able to do something, really make an effort on behalf of Sergeant Mitchum. And then doubts assailed me. I knew so few people in the world of patrons and successful artists. It wasn't going to be altogether easy, telephoning to people I knew slightly in London and asking them to spare the time to meet an entirely unknown sergeant who, on my word alone, seemed to have a quite outstanding talent.

And what if I myself were wrong? My own eye might be out.

I persuaded Sergeant Mitchum to show me the sketchbook he had kept throughout the campaign and, though I had no yardstick except my own judgment, again and again as I turned the pages I was struck by the quality of his work. I cannot

imagine how so sensitive a talent survived such circumstances. It was like coming upon a patch of harebells blossoming on the bloody midden of war.

"Look here," I said, "may I take these and show them to Lord Ranelagh?"

"Who, sir?"

"Lord Ranelagh."

"Who's he, sir?"

"Well, he's a G.2 or something like that at Division; but the point is that he owns one of the finest collections of water-colours in England."

So I took the sketchbook to Divisional Headquarters and showed it to the man whose father had been the late Sir Jeremiah Colman's only serious rival in the acquisition of Cotmans, whose great-grandfather had been the patron and intimate friend of Turner, and who, himself, was one of the very few patrons of living artists who was equipped with both money and perception.

"Dick," I said, "would you have a look at these? I may be dead wrong about them, but I don't think I am."

He opened the sketchbook. "Oh yes," he said, "*yes*. Just look at that . . ."

"But what do I do?" I said. "Who do I introduce him to? Who would help?"

He thought for a moment. "D'you know Derek Pretzl?"

"Slightly."

"He's in England. He's in the Camouflage Corps, but he still keeps his studio in London and paints when he can."

"May I say you approve?"

"Of course. Tell him from me that he must find time to look at these."

We were to spend three days at Chelsea Barracks before going on leave. At lunchtime on the day after our arrival I telephoned to Derek's studio and, by great good luck, spoke to him personally.

"Derek," I said, "Ranelagh told me to tell you about this chap. D'you think you could possibly find time to see him?"

There were difficulties. Derek himself had only a week's leave. He was in the middle of painting a portrait. London in March wasn't providing much daylight in which to paint. And so on. I realized that it was asking a good deal. Derek Pretzl was probably the most consistently successful painter then working in England. I knew—he didn't have to tell me—what his time was worth. Nevertheless, he said he'd see me and my protégé at half past three when, with any luck, there'd still be a little daylight left.

I got hold of Sergeant Mitchum and we drove to Bedford Square. A Chinese manservant opened the door. In the passage to the studio hung the originals of the designs which Derek had done just before the war for a new de Basil production of L'Oiseau de Feu; and, as we entered the studio, we were confronted by portraits of—reading from left to right—Gracious Majesty in a full dress uniform, two film stars of world fame, General de Gaulle, and a particularly pretty girl who had recently married a slightly shop-soiled duke.

At the end of the room, on a golden throne supported by lions and sphinxes, lay yet another film star dressed as Cleopatra. Derek was painting away at his easel. I'd never been to his studio before, and I was enormously impressed. In particular I thought how excellent it was of this chap, sitting comfortably on the topmost branch of the tree called Success, to spare twenty minutes of precious London daylight to look at Sergeant Mitchum's sketchbook.

Derek stopped painting, the film star put down her golden goblet and uncurled herself from her throne, and we all shook hands.

An oddish little quartette. Derek in suède shoes, service dress trousers, and Lonsdale yellow braces; us, hot and ungainly in battledress and clumping boots; and Cleopatra touching up her face from a powder compact. Then I talked to Cleopatra, and Derek and Sergeant Mitchum went over to a window at the end of the studio.

I was too far away to hear their conversation in detail, but I saw Derek open the sketchbook and I heard him say, " Oh yes. Oh my goodness me, *yes*."

Presently they joined us.

" The man you ought to see," said Derek, " is Magnus Leaven. He lives in Albany. I think he's there during the week. I'll give you a letter to him."

As we drove back to barracks I tried to explain who Sir Magnus Leaven was.

" Well," I said, " he's a trustee of the National Gallery, he's on the Arts Council, he's written endless learned books, he'd be automatically on the committee of any Winter Exhibition at Burlington House . . ."

I dropped Sergeant Mitchum at the barracks and went on to my club where, after three rough drafts, I succeeded in writing a covering letter for Derek's note to Sir Magnus. I explained that we were just back, and had only two more days in London. I asked, using I hope exactly the right degree of deference, if he could see us the next day. I took a great deal of trouble over the

letter. Then I went round to Albany and gave it to Sir Magnus' servant. Later that evening, I received a message suggesting three o'clock the next day.

Sir Magnus' chambers were exactly as I had expected them to be. Silence, late afternoon sunshine, a window-box of hyacinths, a wood fire, books in lovely bindings, a Derain of Sir Magnus over the fireplace, a brilliant charcoal sketch of him as a young man by Sargent, inscribed, " For Magnus, from J.S.S.," a perfect little Gainsborough, a Matthew Smith, a . . . but at this point the great man himself came in and shook hands.

In a few minutes he had taken the sketchbook over to a table by the window and, as he turned the pages, " Oh yes," he said, " oh *yes*." Then, putting in his famous eyeglass and laying a hand with a cameo ring on Sergeant Mitchum's shoulder, " Dear boy, where did you learn to paint like this? "

The visit ended with Sir Magnus commissioning Sergeant Mitchum to paint two pictures for him. He suggested the sort of subject. He told him he would pay twenty-five guineas for each of them.

When we got into Albany courtyard, I couldn't help a slight burst of enthusiasm. " I do congratulate you," I said. " You're made. You're home and dry. I am so very glad."

Human vanity is human vanity. It's just as well to admit it, sometimes. I remember, and I know I ought to feel ashamed of it, that what was really uppermost in my mind at that moment —which ought to have been the moment of Sergeant Mitchum's triumph unalloyed by anything baser—was immense satisfaction at the complete vindication of my own artistic perception.

Not a very noble memory.

We went on leave next day and, while I was on leave, I was posted to the farthest East and I never rejoined the battalion.

It was a chaotic period in which to attempt any sort of international correspondence. VJ Day succeeded VE Day, and I was in a climate where envelopes stuck themselves up before you put a letter into them but, of course, I did find time to write.

Sergeant Mitchum didn't answer. But, by now, the battalion had moved twice and my letter might easily have gone astray. Then I heard that he had been demobilized, so I wrote to his home address and, four months later, got the letter back with the words *not known* written across it.

I was sad, but I comforted myself with the thought that the triumph was his and not mine; and anyhow, I reflected, no one ever forgives you if you do him a big enough favour.

Many times I imagined to myself the second meeting of Sir

Magnus and Sergeant Mitchum. "Dear boy, they're quite lovely," he would have said, and then there would have been that cheque for fifty guineas with all its special flavour of a first success. Doubtless by now there were other cheques and—who knows?—perhaps they had another nought on the end of them. It was—vanity again, perhaps—of enormous satisfaction to me in my own humdrum life to realize that, though I might have achieved nothing else of consequence, I had at any rate lifted one of my fellow men out of the rut.

I got home in March 1947 after two years abroad, and reported to the Headquarters of my Regiment. There, sitting smartly upright in his office overlooking the parade ground was the Adjutant who, when I had last seen him, had been a bright young platoon-commander in my company. He stood up as I came in, thus deftly closing the drawer of his desk and concealing the *Daily Zipper* which lay open inside it.

As ever on such occasions we were soon discussing mutual regimental friends and acquaintance, and I was asking where A was now, and what had happened to B.

"Of course," said the Adjutant, "the regimental success story, the boy who really has made good, is that chap Mitchum. D'you remember him? He was a sergeant in Headquarters Company."

"Yes."

"It's fantastic. He's got a house at Virginia Water, and he drives about in a brand-new Jaguar. I'm told he makes five thousand a year."

"I'm so glad," I said.

"Yes," said the Adjutant, "somebody gave him an introduction. I forget who it was. Then he sent in some of his drawings, and apparently they were exactly what was wanted. And now he's syndicated and his stuff sells all over America."

"Syndicated?"

"Yes." The Adjutant opened the drawer of his desk and turned to the page of comic strips. He passed the paper to me and pointed with his finger.

"This is his stuff. Didn't you know?"

I looked.

The Binky Boos, it said, by *Mitch*.

"I must say, I think it's bloody funny, don't you?" said the Adjutant.

"Bloody funny," I said.

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When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

THE MAN WHO MET HIMSELF

When I walked into his line of vision he looked through me

BY EDITH PARGETER

IF I hadn't known Frank Willard for four years without ever really knowing the first thing about him, I might not have felt so deeply involved. I'd played in the same cricket club for two seasons, and lifted my hat to him and his wife after church almost every Sunday morning since I'd come into the district; and yet when they fetched me to the police station that evening, it was as though I saw him for the first time.

He was sitting on an upright chair, with his hands slack between his knees, staring straight ahead of him with blank blue eyes in a stunned face, as though memory and mind had left him altogether.

When I walked into his line of vision he looked through me. His well-polished black shoes and rather worn grey suit were as neat as ever, but the man inside them had stopped functioning. The doctor said he was in a state of shock. Queer the way the human mind works. Nothing whatever had happened to him physically, nothing new had come to his knowledge; the thing that shocked him had been there within his consciousness for over a year; the only new development was that it had just been taken from behind his eyes and set, as it were, in front of them.

Exactly half an hour earlier, the police had arrested him for falsifying the books of his firm on a dozen separate occasions, and misappropriating to his own use something like five hundred pounds.

I had to touch him before he realized I was there. I sat down in front of him, and took his hands, and my grip seemed to penetrate his consciousness.

But when I said, "Hullo, Frank, what's been happening to you?" he only stared at me helplessly, and said, "I don't know," like a child who's had a fright.

He'd been like that from the first moment, they said. He'd listened to the caution and the charge, and then simply let go of

everything. It was too much for him now that it was out in full view. He couldn't grasp it.

All he'd said to the charge was, "Yes." And some minutes later, as though he wanted to explain, "She was used to nice things. She didn't understand about money."

It wasn't much, but it was enough.

He'd been slightly careless, it seemed, over the last transaction, and the amount was bigger, too. Almost all of it was still in the house; he showed them where, moving like a sleep-walker.

So far as he had any mind left he did his best to co-operate. I could understand that. Thirty-two years old, hard-working, a mirror of unassuming respectability, kindly, scrupulous, patient, precise, his natural place was on the side of the law.

There wasn't much I could do for him at that stage, either as probation officer or as friend. His police-court appearance had to be deferred for three weeks or more, because he wasn't fit to be put in the dock.

For two or three days he continued half dead, and then the numbness wore off and he was infinitely worse, alternating between collapse and hysteria. He spent a week under sedatives, and slowly emerged into a sort of calm, a sort of articulate life.

As soon as he was fit to talk to a solicitor I went to see his wife, to urge her to get him into the hands of a good man as quickly as possible.

I'd never really noticed her before, or I should have understood. She received me in the sitting-room of their small, respectable house, in a dress which wouldn't have been out of place at an embassy cocktail party, and wearing a sapphire pendant on a platinum chain. Twenty-eight, very pretty, very chic, with a hard, bright finish. Gold hair and a short, full, hungry mouth.

She was very voluble indeed on the subject of her husband. It had been a terrible shock to her, and she couldn't forgive it. He'd brought disgrace on her, drawn down a barrage of gossip and calumny upon her innocent person. For innocent she certainly felt herself to be, and deeply injured. It was no part of her duty to associate herself with a criminal, and she didn't intend to.

He could get legal aid, couldn't he? She had her own position to think of. If she left the public in any doubt of where she stood she would be doing herself an injustice.

She meant to give evidence for the prosecution. Oh, she knew she wasn't forced to by law, but she owed it to herself. Frank must take the consequences of his own actions, he wasn't going to shuffle them off on to her. As for briefing a lawyer, where did

I think she was to get the money? She was left to provide for herself now; not that he ever had been very good at providing for a wife. And besides, there was the principle of the thing!

I was glad to get out of there. The room was as much of a revelation, in its way, as Mrs. Willard herself. It was most expensively decorated, and full of possessions. There was a cabinet full of very good china, the carpet was Persian, and the piano a magnificent grand. Jade and cut glass ornamented the shelf over the fireplace. No need to ask where the money had gone. I remembered, too, now that I had the clue, a coat which I'd taken for granted as a mere imitation of the fur it seemed to be. With tastes like that, she obviously had no funds to spare for her husband's defence.

It was I who got him a solicitor. He had wanted to plead guilty, but Fordyce tried to persuade him to change his plea. He was still inclined to go where he was pushed, past caring where our efforts landed him, since his world had already fallen to pieces; but when he understood that his wife meant to take the stand and give evidence if the case had to be heard in full, he made up his mind irrevocably on a plea of guilty. He was entirely ignorant of the obligations and exemptions of law, and thought he was sparing her a terrible ordeal, and we let him think it. There wasn't much else we could do for him.

The police had opposed bail, purely because they were afraid of what he might do to himself if they let him out of their care. I went to see him shortly before the assizes. He was still a very sick man, he was going to be that for a long time ahead, but in a stunned fashion he could talk coherently and reason sensibly by then. He talked about her; he always did.

"You know, I never really believed in my luck. Someone as beautiful and gay and bright as Eileen—what could she find in a man like me? She could have married whom she pleased, they were round her thick as bees, fellows with plenty of self-confidence, fellows with good prospects. And she took me and my twelve pounds a week, and no hope of getting any farther!

"I got to feeling how badly I was letting her down. She was meant to have beautiful things, they're her proper setting, and she loves them so.

"Oh, you mustn't think she complained! She admired them just like a child, wondering why she couldn't have them, when she wanted them so much. She didn't realize how costly nice things are. Money was something she didn't understand. She just fell in love with things she saw. I couldn't bear it. It was like letting a child starve in front of your eyes."

Through his labouring voice I could hear hers, that clear,

constant, injured voice lamenting that other wives should have things which were out of her reach, reminding him eternally, in oblique ways, that she might have married so-and-so and been well-off, that she'd condescended to his hopeless, helpless love, and he owed it to her to maintain her properly. I heard the endless, inescapable implication of his miserable betrayal of her, and her forsaken condition, until everything, even his honour, which meant more to him than to most men nowadays, became expendable in the cause of her happiness.

What he had done was horrible to him, but in the same circumstances he would have done it again. In his own eyes he was damned in any case, and he embraced his damnation if it could give her a few gleams of pleasure.

"I asked her not to come and see me here," he said. "I couldn't bear that. Not even to write, until the trial's over and everything's settled."

I thanked God for that, at any rate, since it saved him from wondering and grieving when she didn't come; for, of course, she wouldn't have dreamt of coming near him.

Always, before I left him, he asked me, breathlessly, as though the words burst out of his heart and tore their way to his throat without any will of his, "Have you seen her? How's she looking?"

I told him she was bearing up admirably. What else could I have done? I couldn't tell him she'd already persuaded the landlord to transfer the tenancy of the house to her, and had been seen out with him in the town on several evenings lately; or that she was reputed to be about to take a part-time job in the box-office of the most palatial cinema, whose manager had a somewhat mottled reputation where women were concerned, though to do him justice he never pestered any who were unwilling.

"The first time," said Willard, thinking back laboriously over the year of his downfall, "it was the fur coat that did it. I was afraid she might guess how I got the money, but she never did."

She took good care not to, I thought but did not say.

"And then she was pining for a good piano. She plays well, you know; it was terrible for her, having to be content with a second-rate instrument. I had to get the money somehow. I *had* to get these things for her. You didn't know her—you can't understand."

I understood too well, but the words that bled out of him were also something I could comprehend and pity.

"The last time—" his blue eyes, still opaque as lapis lazuli in a face petrified in bewildered suffering, stared through me—"it was because of The Hall being sold, and all those beautiful

things coming under the hammer. We had been there one Sunday, when the place was on show last summer, and she had never forgotten. There was a set of Meissen china, white and gold filigree, the prettiest you ever saw—she talked about it for months after. And a little inlaid ivory cabinet and a full-length Venetian mirror in a black glass frame. When she knew they were all to be sold she almost fell ill with longing for them. What could I do? I had to buy them for her. I meant it to be the last time—but you always do mean that.

" Mr. Benson wrote to me—did you know? Such a kind letter, you wouldn't think I'd been robbing him for over a year. I can't write back. Not yet. I'd like to, but I can't do it. Will you give him my thanks, and say—how sorry—"

I always left when he began to cry. Not because the sight embarrassed me, I was long past that, but because about then he seemed to forget I was there, and to lapse into his dazed condition again. Pure exhaustion, I think; talking, thinking, remembering, even existing was physically tiring to him.

Because of his plea of guilty, and his complete submission, and because for once it needed no lawyer to urge that here was a broken man, he got eighteen months. The governor of the prison where he was sent had a long talk with me about him, and the M.O., who regarded the term as one of sanctuary rather than penance, was furious about the sentence.

" What in the world do they think we can do with him in only eighteen months? " he wanted to know. " From what I've seen so far, he'll spend the first six months more in hospital than out of it, and after that he'll need psychiatric treatment for a hell of a lot longer than the seven or eight months we shall have left. Just when he's within hopeful distance of normality again we shall have to turn him loose and, unless he is exceptionally lucky or tougher than I think he is, he'll end up in a mental hospital within a year after that."

I felt much the same way about it, but we had to make the best of it. And he responded better than had been expected. He was a model prisoner, co-operative, gentle, anxious as ever to give the minimum trouble and the maximum satisfaction. Something he'd never noticed about himself, and didn't notice now, took over his life in prison and helped him to benefit by it: people easily grew fond of him.

His wife wrote him one letter, sharp and cold as ice, condemning his crime, dissociating herself from it, and stating the measures she was taking for her own maintenance now that he had failed her. It never reached him.

The governor sent it back to her with the request that she

would avoid using such a tone in the future, and confine herself to innocuous subjects, if she wanted to help her husband. He need not have troubled, for she had written merely to break off relations, and had no intention of ever writing again. So Willard was spared her whips and scorpions, and he made good progress.

We all dreaded the time when he would have completed his sentence, and be thrown back upon the problem from which only prison was protecting him. I felt so strongly about it that I even went to see his wife again, prepared to beg for her sympathy and help if necessary. I need not have troubled, either.

She overwhelmed me with her righteousness. She'd inquired about divorce, and was amazed and disgusted to be told that she had no grounds, that the imprisonment of one partner didn't absolve the other from her marriage vows. But at least she was absolutely determined that she would never receive or live with him again. The tenancy of the house was now hers, and if Frank came forcing himself on her here she'd slam the door in his face, the dirty crook!

She was brazenly beautiful, discreetly jewelled, expensively dressed, and looked somehow both more splendid and more vulgar than when I'd last seen her. The sitting-room had new and elegant curtains, and in the china cabinet there was a new tea service—new, that is, to me. White and gold filigree, incredibly delicate and thin. I recognized the Meissen from The Hall by its description. If Frank hadn't managed to give it to her, someone else had. No doubt the ivory cabinet was somewhere about the house, too, I thought. She was a woman who knew how to get what she wanted.

As I was leaving, another visitor arrived, a large, prosperous-looking man climbing out of a large, prosperous-looking car, and swinging in through the gate as if he owned the place. He wasn't the landlord. Was he the cinema manager? I didn't know the fellow very well, but as far as my recollection went he was younger than this specimen.

The man gave me a very narrow and suspicious look from the doorstep as I went away, and I've no doubt as soon as the door was shut he wanted to know who I was, and what I was doing there. She was getting her personal affairs a little involved, was Eileen Willard. I was thankful I couldn't be classed as a competitor. This type I'd seen on race-courses, and in certain pubs where somewhat hush-hush business was carried on over short drinks.

The problem of Frank remained.

No use allowing him to walk in all innocence into the kind of reception she would give him. No use leaving him in his fool's

purgatory of hope any longer. The governor would have broken it to him, but I volunteered for the job because, almost without meaning to, I seemed to have drawn nearer to Willard than anyone else, and these responsibilities one can't escape.

We were left alone, and I told him exactly how it was. That it was over, that it was no use hoping to make her change her mind. I went further, since there was no help for it. I told him she was no good, never had been, never would be, and that he was well rid of her, though I had no hope at all of convincing him of that.

I told him there was only one thing to do, and he must do it: cut her clean out of his life, and start afresh without her.

He didn't protest, he wasn't angry. When I finished, he didn't say a word. Until I saw that dead, blank look of shock in his eyes again I couldn't even be sure whether he'd heard me, or understood what he heard. It was the first disaster over again, only a thousand times worse.

As he'd known all along that he was a thief, and yet been shattered when the fact was dragged into the daylight, so he'd known all along that she was a bitch, and yet having her unworthiness laid before him in so many words had all the impact of a revelation.

He sat looking at me for a long moment in the silence of despair, and then the numbness faded out of his face before the absolute, awful conviction of his loneliness and desolation. His hands began to grope in front of him in panic, feeling for anything that still shared the darkened world with him. I gripped and held them, and went on talking to him, not about her now, about him, about his future, about his ability to remake his life. He struggled for a moment, and then he collapsed.

He still hadn't said a word or made a sound.

The M.O. gave him an injection, and he slept for twelve hours. He was under drugs for several days. Gradually, rather more readily than expected, he came back to what was now normality for him—a dumb, patient, listless resignation, obliging but unconvincing. He'd lost a lot of flesh, and with it, surprisingly, years of his age. He had even become unexpectedly good-looking in a motionless, emaciated way. But grey streaks had appeared in his hair.

He was quite calm now, and he never talked about her. No one could tell what was going on in his mind, but certain queer traits in his behaviour seemed to worry the M.O.

People often turn to spiritualism or occultism when bereaved, and I suppose no one was ever more bereaved than he; yet

there was a nasty feeling of the abnormal about his new preoccupation with signs and portents, with superstitions we'd never heard of, and oracles appropriate rather to the play of children than to the desperation of men. I think he was still hoping for a sign from heaven that somehow Eileen would be given back to him.

He asked for library books on the occult, and talked with a kind of willing faith about visitations and dreams and their meanings, about sendings, ghosts of the living, and portents of death.

Only once did he mention his wife. He said he had met her in the yard during exercise. She was wearing her mink coat, and she came towards him as though he didn't exist. Just as she began to melt into his flesh she vanished.

But that tendency apart, he was decidedly better than he had been since his trial and, in spite of all the M.O.'s misgivings, unquestionably sane. He went about the daily routine with more will and quickening interest, still dully but intelligently. I began to hope that he was at least entering on convalescence.

I'd planned to meet him myself when he was released, but a very awkward case blew up that morning, and I had to send a car to fetch him while I rushed off to the other end of the county. The driver had orders to bring him straight to my house, where I meant to keep him until I saw how he was shaping.

My housekeeper, who is a good soul, and considers my job to be very much her concern, had guaranteed to take care of him until I came home. But I was away all day, and when I got back at six o'clock in the evening she was waiting for me with a long face, and there was no Willard to be seen.

"He gave the driver the slip," she told me. "Asked him to stop while he bought some stamps, and then walked out of the Post Office by the other door.

"There was nothing for the poor man to do but come back and report. He couldn't possibly find him. I thought about ringing the police to look out for him, but after all, we can't force him to accept help, and he hasn't done anything wrong. Only it does make one rather anxious."

I was more than anxious by that time, but there was nothing I could do about it. She had even gone down unobtrusively and walked past Mrs. Willard's house, to make sure there was no one hanging about there, and no sign of any disturbance.

I told her everything was sure to be all right, and we were being silly, and sent her home; but I sat over the telephone all the evening, hesitating whether to notify the police or not.

It was impossible, of course, when it came to the point. He was adult, sane and, as far as I knew, without either criminal or

irresponsible intentions of any kind. I couldn't send out a hunt for him as though for an escaped lunatic.

Towards nine o'clock I took the car, and drove slowly through the town, keeping my eyes open, but there was no sign of him. All the same, I didn't go to bed; I shouldn't have slept.

It was just after midnight when something came fumbling at the door, like a blind man feeling about its surface for a latch. A tiny, shuffling, hair-raising sound one wouldn't have heard at all in the day. I opened the door, scared for my life of what I was going to find; and there he was groping stiffly with one hand, and dangling a gun from the other.

The light made stony, pale pebbles of his staring eyes, and his jaw hung open and rigid. I brought him in on my arm, and he stumbled up the steps and moved like an automaton across the room, wherever I led him. He let me put him into a chair, and lay there still with that fixed, horrified face. I tried to get some brandy into him, but he choked on it, and it ran down his dangling chin.

Then I tried to take the gun from him, but he held on to it with sudden resolution, and said, "No, don't touch it! Not you; only me!" And he began to weep, almost silently, without any sobs.

"What's happened?" I asked him, shaking him by the shoulders. "Where have you been? What have you done?"

"I've killed her," he said. The voice that came out of him was small, still dazed but quiet. "I shot her. I'm sorry about your driver, but you see, I had to go and get the gun. And I didn't want you to be involved. I had to get away from you. I was going to kill her, and then myself. And I've done the one, but there's no need to do the other. I'm going to die, anyhow. I've had a sign."

I wasn't interested in signs, only in facts. I shook him roughly, shouting at him to tell me exactly what had happened, and how he'd obtained the gun in the first place. He said it belonged to an old lag he'd made friends with in prison, who had revealed the fact that he possessed one. Willard had asked if he could borrow it when he went out, and the man had given him a note for his wife, so that she would let him have it. Then he'd gone to earth in a cinema until night, and on to Eileen's house under cover of darkness.

"The door wasn't locked," he said in the same soft, hopeless voice. "She was expecting somebody. Not me. One of *them!* The hall was in darkness, and the stairs, too, but upstairs her bedroom door was half open, and her light was on. It cast a very

faint light down the well of the stairs. I didn't need any light. I knew every knot in the floor, every worn place in the carpet.

"I began to climb the stairs; and when I was coming up to the midway landing I met myself coming down. I'm not mad! I looked up suddenly as I stepped on to the landing, and I was there—face to face with myself—coming down. I'm not mistaken! I know what I saw. I know this face, I know the clothes I'm wearing. And the gun! He—I—had the gun, too. So I knew I'd already done it, and she was dead. And I'm going to die, too. When you meet a sending of yourself, you know you're going to die."

It made no sense, it couldn't have happened, and yet I was afraid. I bullied him, trying to get straight answers out of him. "You turned back on the stairs? You didn't go on to her room?"

"What need was there?" he said, beginning to shake all over with horror and the reflection of my fear. "*He'd* already been."

"But you didn't—did you? When you met him—yourself—you were frightened, you ran out of the house—"

"Yes, I ran out of the house."

"You didn't go on? You remember that?"

"I don't know! No—I killed her! She's dead!"

"What time was it? Do you know? Did you come straight here to me when you ran away?"

I was only confusing and frightening him even more. The awful sobs came, shattering him, tearing out of him with such violence I was afraid he might die under my hands.

I imagined him feeling his way up the stairs in the half darkness, trembling with despair, and love, and hate, lightheaded with hunger, for he'd surely never thought to eat anything all day. How could he know what he was saying or doing? It would have to wait until he was rested, and fed, and calm, and by then we should know well enough that Eileen Willard was alive and venomous as ever, and all he'd suffered was a crazy hallucination.

I filled him up with sedative tablets, and got him into my own bed, which I certainly wouldn't need myself that night. After some time the tablets worked, and he passed out. He still had the gun clutched in his hand, determined that no print should ever connect me with it, and I hadn't cared to distress him further by forcing it away from him. Now that he was fast asleep at last I was afraid to try to break the death-grip he had on it, but even more afraid to leave it where it was.

I got it away from him gradually, gently working his fingers loose, one by one. And just as I was going downstairs to examine it somewhere well away from him, the telephone rang.

It was the police. They wanted to know if Frank Willard was safely with me, where they understood he was supposed to be. I said he was, and asleep in bed. My heart was pumping so, I thought the Inspector couldn't help hearing, but my voice sounded all right, and I was encouraged to ask, "Why? What's it all about?" Only checking up, I thought. Knowing the state he's been in.

"Just wanted to make sure he was safe in your hands," said the Inspector. "Lucky for him! Constable on the beat by his wife's place spotted the side door was ajar about half an hour ago, couldn't rouse anybody with the knocker, so he went in. Found the woman dead in her bedroom—murdered. Glad your man's well out of it. What time did he turn up?"

How fast can you sort out all the pitfalls, and present an impregnable lie, without even knowing you're going to do it? I did it—so far as the circumstances could be reckoned up on the known facts—in half a second flat.

They would easily find out he'd given us the slip this morning. They might find out about the gun, but that could be disposed of, he could have repented and thrown it in the river. Then, my housekeeper knew he was still missing when she went home at something after six. Had he been seen by anyone during the last hour or so before he came to me? There was no way of knowing, I could only make a guess.

How much time could I give back to him without risking a host of witnesses against us? What time had she been killed? Late? Lovers steal in by unlocked side doors only after dark, and after the crowds have gone home from the cinemas.

"About ten o'clock," I said. "Not in very good condition. He's up against a tremendous readjustment, and it's all rather too much for him. I've given him a sedative, and he's dead to the world. Anything I can do?"

"This won't exactly help the poor devil," said the Inspector sympathetically.

"You're right, it won't. Maybe I can keep him from hearing about it for a day or two. Try not to ring me here, in case he's around. Any idea who did it?"

"No statement yet," he said, and rang off.

When I put down the telephone I was shaking like a leaf. The gun had gone clean out of my mind, and lay forgotten in the desk drawer all night. I felt sick. I couldn't believe it was myself I'd heard, lying, calculating, obstructing the police, aiding and abetting a possible murderer. I couldn't grasp it. I felt caught like a fly in a web. So that's how these things begin, as smoothly as that, out of pity and rage, out of a sense of an

injustice which was certainly not the fault of the law. From whom had Frank Willard received solid help and sympathy, if not from the police and the prison authorities? And yet what I'd done I couldn't for my life have helped doing.

She was dead. She had been murdered.

No use hoping now for a nice, bright, normal morning, the kind that makes midnight fancies contemptible, a bright morning and Eileen Willard passing by, alive and well on the arm of one of her new men. One point in his story was confirmed already; now what, for God's sake, was I to do for him, and for my miserable self? I'd begun something that had to be finished, but to save my life I didn't know how.

I couldn't rest. I prowled about the house until the first light, and then I left Willard still sleeping heavily, and went down into the town. I had to find out more about times and details, in order to know what to say when the inevitable further questions began. Until I knew more I could neither come out with the truth nor go on lying.

The Inspector didn't seem surprised to see me. I suppose some uneasiness on my part was only too natural, since I had the husband in my care.

"What are you worrying about," he said, with a smile that disquieted me horribly, "if your protégé was tucked up in bed soon after ten?"

"All very well for you," I said. "I have to break the news to him sooner or later, and I know how precariously balanced he is. I want to be able to answer all his questions, and get the miserable business over. *How do you suppose he's going to* react if a couple of uniformed policemen turn up suddenly to interview him, after all he's been through?"

"That won't be necessary," he said placidly. "We won't even ask him to identify the body; she has a brother who can do that."

With cold sweat crawling down my back I fished doggedly on, "Thank goodness for that. I'd hate him to have to view the wreckage. She can't be so pretty now—like that, in her blood—"

"Who said anything about blood?" he asked mildly, hoisting an eyebrow. "But you're right about her not being pretty. Strangled women aren't."

"Strangled?" I felt my knees give under me, and leaned hard on the edge of his desk to keep myself upright.

"There was a small amount of blood smeared around," he conceded thoughtfully, "but it wasn't hers. She put up quite a struggle. The man who did it left most of the skin of his wrists and forearms under her fingernails. An all too usual end for a

woman of her type. She's been running at least three men on strings since her husband went to gaol; she was bound to get herself knocked off sooner or later."

I couldn't speak for a moment, I felt so light-headed and sick with relief. I'd had Frank Willard's lean wrists in my hands only a few hours ago, while I coaxed the gun out of his fingers; I knew he hadn't a scratch on him. The police didn't want him, weren't even interested in him.

Who was it he'd seen creeping down the stairs, then? A real man, after all; not a hallucination? Had he been right in feeling that she was already dead? Had he run headlong into her murderer? Someone who looked like enough to himself to drive him out of the house in superstitious terror? If so, he might be able to help the police, and the truth would have to come out. Well, I was the only one who'd lied about it, not he; no one could hold that against him.

With difficulty I asked my question casually, "What time was she killed?"

"Not twenty minutes before the constable found her, most probably. Certainly not before one o'clock."

She'd been alive, then, when Frank entered the house, alive and waiting in her room for whichever of her admirers was due that night. And, but for the grace of God and the apparition on the stairs, Frank would surely have walked in upon her and shot her dead, and himself after her.

"As late as that? Then the fellow who did it couldn't possibly have got far," I said, hardly knowing what I was talking about, I was so demoralized with relief.

"He didn't," said the Inspector simply, and jerked his head towards the door behind him. "Between you and me, he's in there now, safe and sound, and I hope by this time he's talking. Not that it'll make much difference whether he does or not, his hands and wrists are just about clawed to pieces. They won't have much trouble matching up the debris from under her nails with his injuries. Fellow by the name of Clandon, a bookie. Not the sort of man I'd try double-crossing, if I were a woman, but she was no judge of men.

"An inquisitive neighbour saw his car drive away. We put out a call for it less than an hour after we found her, and picked him up at Shelworth, heading south." He added kindly, "You know, you don't look too well, George. Missed your sleep over that lame dog of yours? I'd go home and snatch a few hours rest if I were you."

I'll never know how much he knew. Maybe nothing. Maybe he only had a feeling that I'd lied to him. He'd had plenty of

practice in detecting lies, and I hadn't had much in telling them. But even if he knew more, even if Willard had left traces of his presence in the house, they weren't interested. They had the man they wanted.

Maybe I wasn't looking well, but I felt wonderful, I felt reprieved. For myself and for Willard, too.

I went home and sat by his bed, and told him every word that had passed, except for the lie and the comments on Eileen. He thawed into sensibility and intelligence as I talked; in those few minutes he came a long way back from wherever it was he'd been heading—disintegration, mental collapse, the abdication of humanity.

He kept saying, "I didn't kill her! I didn't kill her!" in a voice of stupefied delight. And at the end he said, but quite gently now, "Then if it wasn't a sending I met on the stairs—what was it?"

"An image of grace," I said, "to turn you back in your tracks, and head you in the direction of life."

And he looked back at me without a smile, but with the grave wonder of somebody waking from sleep, and said, "Yes. Yes, that's what it must have been."

But it was only three or four weeks later, when the inquest and the police-court hearing were already over, that we found out the exact mechanics of mercy. Willard was her heir, of course, since she'd never made a will, and when he had to go to the house and look over all the stuff there to see what he wanted to keep and what was to be sold, he asked me to go with him. It wasn't fear or superstition—he was clear of both by then—it was a natural human reluctance to go alone into a place that had so many painful memories for him.

It was evening when we went in, and heavily overcast, and the hall was in half darkness because the bulb had blown. I went up the stairs first, and when I stepped on to the midway landing I came face to face with myself, all in an instant, as the faint light from the first-floor corridor window fell upon me after the comparative darkness below.

Even at that hour of day the effect was devastating. I recoiled upon Willard as he followed me up. And then I saw him spring out of the obscurity at my shoulder, and everything crystallized into mere glass and the trickery of the restricted light.

I ought to have known. She was a woman who knew how to get what she wanted. Everything she wanted. Not only the Meissen china and the ivory cabinet, but also the full-length Venetian mirror, framed in black glass, that was too big to fit

happily into any of her rooms, and had to be set up here on the dark wall at the turn of the stairs, where there'd never been a mirror before.

That's one thing for which I shall be grateful to Clandon as long as he lives, in gaol or out. It turned out he was the one who gave it to her.

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IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

at night to enjoy ARGOSY, and next month's issue has a splendidly varied assortment of reading from favourite authors. Whether you're a reader-in-bed or a late-night browser, watch out for

H. E. BATES

this versatile writer leads you to one of his favourite observation-posts—the lively, shabby streets of a small country town, brilliantly rendered, where boys' games with prams and half bricks sometimes reflect startlingly the world beyond the cobblestones

GERALD KERSH

sparks off a new long story accounting—in a gorgeously implausible manner put across with his usual gusto—for a famous disappearance on the slopes of Mount Popocatapetl. You'd think albino donkeys, toasted teacakes, vintage wine, might make any guest suspicious, but no . . .

MIGNON G. EBERHART

this well-known thriller-writer weaves a web of suspense as a killer efficiently sets the trap for his next victim. How could it fail when the first murder was so successful?

There's something for everyone in

next month's

ARGOSY

on sale November 7

HOLD THE LINE

As many lines close in the dial's centre;
So many a thousand actions, once afoot,
End in one purpose.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Henry V*

Note for the spoken-worder
Who hasn't got time to spell:
It's 999 for Murder,
But TOL is not for knell,
TRUnk is not for body,
And O is not for well;
WEA, weapon,
Is a fallacy foul and fell,
And TIM is always a lady,
But TEL will never tell.

P. O. Box, *Seven Dials*

High Tone

It was a real telephone box. It had three glass sides and a small roof with slits to let in the air. The actual telephone was rather better than the usual model. It was white and had a pattern of intertwined roses and lotus buds painted on it. In the place of the usual framed instructions for operating the dial was a highly coloured painting of Buddha, seated, and with his eyes closed in contemplation. The inside of the box, where it was not glass, was covered in a quilt of red silk, while in the place where one usually stands to telephone was a high seat, very comfortably upholstered. A small globe at the top was obviously intended to act as a light, though it was not on at the moment. An attachment in front of this, resembling those used on spot-lights, permitted the user of the box to make the light red or blue by

merely pushing round a circle of coloured transparencies. Outside was the customary hook for the telephone directory, on which the Swami now hung a bundle of leaflets, the first of which, in distinguished lettering, was headed:

SORRY YOU'VE BEEN TROUBLED

By Swami Ananda

"Now," the Swami said, "I'm sure you're dying to know what it's all meant for. Shall I tell them, Bay, or will you?"

Bay, who was sitting on the guest bed, leaned back on the pillow and put his feet up.

"No, Swami, *you* tell them. It seems to have changed so much. And in any case you describe it very well."

"This," said the Swami, turning to Catullus and me and indicating the booth, "is a modern meditation box."

AUBREY MENEN, *The Prevalence of Witches*

A—K

Where Alph the printed river runs
Our nomenclature to Abet
We paradoxes find and puns
Our jaded fancy still to whet.

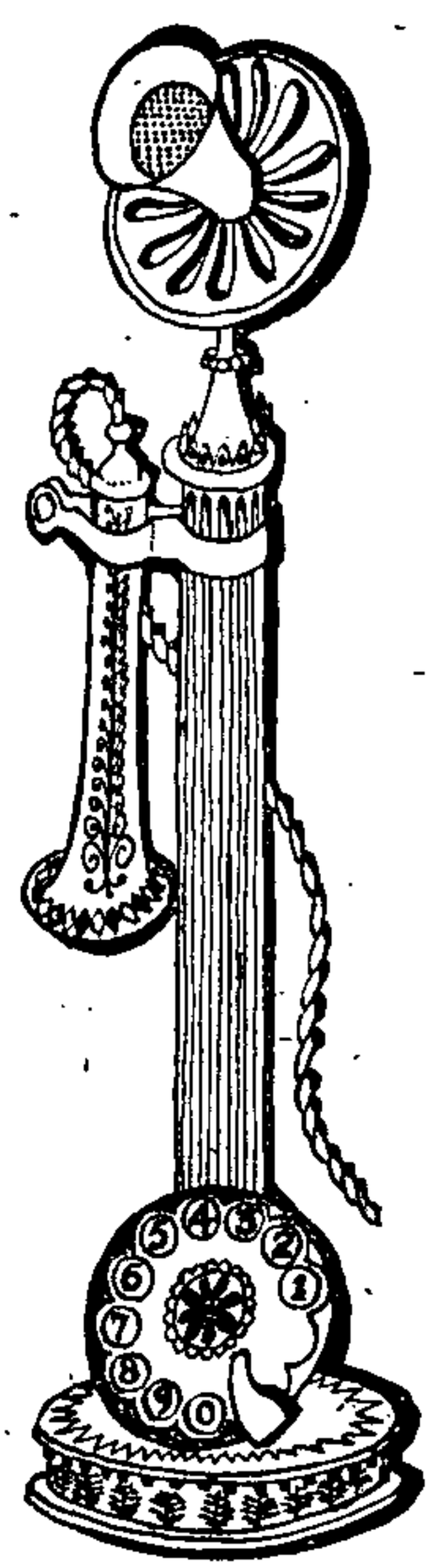
I dreamt I met those names unknown
That yet are folk like you and me
Whom though they're on the telephone
I scarcely hope in flesh to see.

I saw Golightly lumber by
With paralytic Strongitharm,
And Craven who would do or die
Lending a hand with gentle Harm.

Flabelli is it seems a lean
And lanky advocate of Bant,
While candour and reserve are seen
To struggle in the soul of Cant.

For in the boundlessness of chance
The oddest couplings must in time
By mathematic ordinance
Once if once only sound its chime.

R. S. JAFFRAY



Out of Order

Father . . . felt deeply insulted if the speaker at the other end said: "Who's that speaking?" He liked them to say: "Is that Doctor Campbell?" or: "Is that you, Doctor?" If asked, "Who's that speaking?" he invariably replied "Smith," which seemed to satisfy his *amour-propre:* for he would immediately recover his usual good spirits and say: "Oh, it's Doctor *Campbell* you want, is it? I'll go and fetch him." He would then walk away from the 'phone shouting in a shrill, affected tone: "Doctor! Doctor! Somebody wants you on the 'phone". . . .

Once, by some fluke . . . my mother became connected with my father's consulting-room; hearing a new voice breaking into her conversation she naturally asked: "And who's that?"— "Smith" came the immediate indignant reply. "Oh, I know you, Smith! Get along with you!" she replied.

ROY CAMPBELL, *Light on a Dark Horse*

The girl who cleaned my telephone,
That awful-sticky smellophone
Gave me a smile—
And lovingly wiped my dial;
Her look was a gay deceiver
As she fondly replaced the receiver
And Oh! I'll never be the same—
Her face disturbs my slumber,
I do not know her name
Or number
Yet her smile still plucks
At my heart-string—
Each time my 'phone-bell
Starts to ring.

NORMAN SMITH, *Number Unobtainable*

On the Blower

We always had Gaelic maids from the Highlands . . . One evening my father asked one of them to deliver an urgently needed powder to a nursing home. The matron rang to say that it had not arrived, and the parlour-maid was asked what had happened. She replied in her careful English: "I just cannot understand it, Doctor. I asked the telephone girl for the nursing home's number, and I blew all the powder most carefully down the telephone; it should be there by now."

LADY BARNETT, *My Life Line*

THE BLUE WIDOW

Sweet is a grief well ended

BY HARRY MARK PETRAKIS

SOMETHING happened to me the first time I saw the Widow Angela in the grocery shop of old Mantaris. More than just the restless stirring of flesh a man feels in the presence of a lovely woman. I was bothered, as I am often bothered when I see a woman I like and cannot at once touch. After she had walked out with the bread and cheese she had bought, I asked old Mantaris about her.

He rubbed his big-knuckled fingers across the leathery skin of his cheeks. He shook his head sadly. He drew a long breath and sighed. "She is a woman, that one," he said. "She was born and reared in the mountains of the old country. A grown woman at fourteen. She came to this country and married a giant of a man who worked in produce. Then her man died."

"How long has her man been dead?" I asked.

He shook his head slowly, trying to remember. "Two years," he said. "Maybe a little longer. He was a Spartan. A big man with the arms of a wrestler. She has been in mourning ever since."

Two years and maybe longer. Too long for a woman built as the Widow Angela was built to set a seal upon her heart.

Then I understood what had bothered me about her. She was tall and dark, with dark hair pinned back into a prim bun. Her face was pale and clean of powder or rouge. Her lips were full but untouched by lipstick. The black dress she wore was a plain dark folding of cloth high across her breasts and full across her thighs. She was without any of the artifices women use to point up their womanliness. In some strange way this made her more beautiful than any woman I had ever seen.

"She sleeps in a widow's bed," Mantaris said, and his voice shook with woe. "Her good husband sleeps in the cold earth." He paused and licked his thin, dried lips. "I saw her at a picnic with him some years ago. She danced in a line of women, taller than any other. That day she was not pale-cheeked, as she is now, but hot with life. Not one of your withered city women, but a mountain woman wild with the flow of heroic blood."

"You are a patriarch now," I said, "a recorder of history, and a recounter of legends. Stop bagging your bread and slicing your cheese long enough to tell me where she lives."

Suddenly one of his big, long fingers pointed straight at my head like a gun. His leathery cheeks quivered and his eyes burnt. "I know you," he said. "You are bent upon pillage and rape!" He clenched his fist and beat his chest. "You do not see the tragic nobleness of her grief. To see her now and remember her as she was, hurts me here." He touched the region of his heart. His voice sharpened with contempt. "You are touched much farther down."

"My friend," I said gently, "you do me an injustice. I, too, believe in the nobility of grief. Remember, I too am a Greek."

He shrugged and rippled noise through his lips. "It is true you are Greek," he said, "but there are Greeks and Greeks. Some are the descendants of lions, and others . . ."

I put my finger expectantly to my nose.

"Others come from goats," he said.

"She is a lovely woman," I said.

The hard lines of his face softened. "Yes . . ." he said. "Yes."

"A face, like Helen, to launch a thousand ships," I said.

He shook his head approvingly. "Yes," he said.

"She has breasts like great cabbages," I said.

He almost leapt to the ceiling. When he came down, with his face flaming, he slammed his open palm upon the counter. "Your head is a cabbage!" he yelled. "You have no respect."

"You are right," I said. "My old dried-up friend, you are right."

He looked at me scornfully. "What can you know," he said. "What can a young goat know of dignity and beauty?"

"A woman is going to waste while you call me names," I said. "I leave you to your cabbages."

"Then leave your head!" he shouted. "I'll weigh it with the rest."

I waved to him from the door.

The next day was Sunday. All the night before I had tossed restlessly with dreams. I dreamt of the pale-faced Widow Angela whose body looked as if it had been long asleep. There were fine cabbages in my dreams and an old toothless lion who guarded the gate to the patch.

In the early morning I shaved carefully and dressed and left my rooms. I crossed the square past the closed shops. I went to the church beside the Legion hall. I waited outside. From

within I could hear the full, deep tones of the organ and the chanting of the priest.

I waited there until the service ended. Until the doors were opened and the first men and women came out.

When I saw Mantaris I called to him. He looked about and blinked in the sunlight, and then saw me and came closer.

"Watch for her," I said. "Watch for the Widow."

He looked at me in shock and surprise. "You are a crazy man!" he said. "Is your head on straight, or do I call for help?"

"If you do not introduce me," I said, "I will accost her myself, here in front of the church."

"You would not dare!" he said and, breathing hard, he shook his head slowly.

Then I saw her, and my fingers tightened again round his arm. She came out into the sunlight, and the black dress she wore saddened my heart. She wore a small dark hat over her dark hair, her cheeks were still pale, and she walked stiffly without taking notice of those who walked round her.

The old man trembled at my side.

"God help me," he said, and he crossed himself quickly. I gave him a little push and we started through the crowd. A short way down the stone steps we caught up with her. He called out her name, and she stopped and turned.

He looked round desperately once more, as if thinking of escape, and then spoke quickly. "Good morning, Widow Angela," he said. I stood close behind him, a sombre look upon my cheeks. "It is a bright morning," he said.

"Good morning, Mr. Mantaris," she said. "Yes, it is a bright morning."

"Widow Angela—" he said, and he seemed to be having trouble getting the rest out—"may I present Mr. Larakis."

"How do you do, Widow Angela," I said, and I was very careful not to smile. One does not laugh before the watch-fires of grief.

She looked from the old man to me, and her face darkened slightly. The old man shifted in agony from one foot to the other. Then she slowly nodded an acknowledgment and turned to walk on.

I punched the old man in the ribs to follow her. He turned on me snarling, as if he intended to take a chance and clout me. He would not budge. He stood like one of the pillars of the Parthenon. I left him spitting at me under his breath.

I had to run several steps to catch up with her. "Excuse me, Widow Angela," I said. "May I walk with you to the next corner? We are going the same way."

She turned again and looked at me darkly. I think what saved me was the cool and impersonal expression on my face. A shadow of a smile would have ruined me there and then. She nodded without speaking and I fell into step beside her.

We walked silently for a little way and the cars passed in the street and the spring sun shone brightly in the sky.

"Forgive me, Widow Angela," I said. "I knew your husband. I was grieved when I heard of his death. I have been out of the city a long time."

She looked at me with those deep, dark eyes. There was nothing I could understand on her face. Then her cheeks loosened just a little. "Thank you," she said quietly. "It was a terrible loss."

I spoke softly and sympathetically. "A fine man," I said. "Did he ever wrestle? I do not remember ever seeing a man with stronger-looking arms."

She shook her head slowly.

I was sorry for the remembered pain returned to her cheeks. I am not a sadist, but this initial surgery was necessary.

"He was not a wrestler," she said, "but he was very strong."

"I believe he once mentioned to me he came from Sparta."

"Yes," she answered. "Kostas was a Spartan."

"Of course," I said. "Where else? Sparta stands for strength and courage."

We had reached the corner, and she stopped and looked at me again. "He would have been pleased to hear you say that," she said. "Thank you, Mr. . . ."

"Larakis," I said. "Mike Larakis."

"Thank you, Mr. Larakis," she said. "Now I turn here."

I took a deep breath. I had to proceed carefully. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein. "Widow Angela," I said, "please do not think I am disrespectful. It is only that I have not been back in the city very long. My old friends have moved and are gone. Can you understand what it is to be lonely?"

That was a beauty. I could see the shaft of the arrow sticking out of her magnificent chest.

"I know what loneliness is," she said. She spoke the words with real feeling.

I pushed my advantage. "Would it be too forward of me to think you might permit me to have dinner with you?" I asked. "Some quiet restaurant where we might sit and talk?"

She looked at me closely, and I felt unrest under the intensity of her gaze. Those big dark eyes were more than ornaments on the Widow Angela. Her soul poured through them. "I do not go out socially," she said. "Not since my Kostas died."

"Forgive me," I said. "I was too forward. I have offended you. I am sorry."

I can apologize very well. Frankly, it is not an easily-acquired skill.

She shook her head. "Please," she said, "I was not offended. Just that it has been so long."

"A little food," I said. "A little quiet talk with a friend. Surely to allow yourself that is not to show disloyalty to a sacred memory."

I could see her making up her mind. Her skin without make-up gleamed cleanly. I felt a smarting in my fingers. Sweet is a grief well ended.

"All right," she said.

"Thank you," I said humbly. "You are kind to a lonely man." I paused and looked thoughtfully into space. This needed a clincher so she would not change her mind. "I regret I cannot make it tonight," I said. "There is a meeting of one of the church organizations I have just joined." I paused again. "I would rather sit and talk with you," I said.

"You must attend your meeting," she said firmly. "We will make it another night."

"Tomorrow night," I said. "If you are free."

"Tomorrow night," she said.

"I will call for you," I said. "Do you live close by?"

"The brick house," she said. "That one across the street. I have the first-floor flat."

"At six?" I said.

"At six," she said.

"Thank you," I said.

She turned and walked away. I watched with intense interest the fine sway of her marvellous thighs, and savoured my small pleasure like a general who had won the first skirmish but needed yet to win the war.

On the following afternoon I stopped for a moment in the grocer's. Mantaris was bagging warm bread from the oven at the back of the shop. As I walked in he raised his head and sniffed as if an animal had entered.

"Good evening, old man," I said.

He stood glaring at me.

"I merely called to let you know," I said, "tonight I dine with the Widow Angela."

"You lie!" he said.

"This is a serious matter," I said. "I never lie where love is involved."

"Love!" The old man looked as if he might choke on the word. "You would not know love if it had teeth and bit you."

"I will let that pass," I said. "Tonight I dine with a Queen, and I feel kindly towards the peasants."

"Get out, boofo!" he cried. "Go and drop dead!"

I left the store, smiling, and went home to dress . . .

At six that evening I rang the bell of the Widow Angela's flat. She opened the door and she was ready, and we said good evening to one another and commented on the fine spring weather. She went to put on her hat and came back and we walked down the stairs. I led her towards the car.

She shook her head. "Such a lovely evening," she said. "Let us walk. There is a little restaurant not far from here that I often pass and have never entered. May we go there tonight?"

"Certainly," I said.

The restaurant she had spoken of was a small one off Dart Street. A little bell rang over the door as we entered, and we walked down a few stairs into a small room with alcoves, and candles on the tables. I could not have chosen a better atmosphere myself.

A small dark man with a heavy moustache greeted us and ushered us to an alcove. We sat down. I ordered wine. She hesitated, and finally nodded. I sat back and looked at her. Her face in the candlelight of the alcove was a page from an Old Testament psalm. David to Bathsheba. And Solomon's Song.

"You are very kind," I said, "to take pity on a lonely man."

She shook her lovely head. "You must not say that," she said. "I have been lonely, too. It was generous of you to ask me to come."

I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I caused the Widow's heart to sing with joy.

"You are shy," she said. "I realized that yesterday, when we walked from church. You must try to make friends."

I was trying to make friends. Angela, Angela, you have no idea how hard I was trying to make friends.

"I cannot help myself," I said. "As a child I was shy. I have never fully grown out of it."

The waiter brought the bottle of wine. He poured from it into our glasses. The wine gleamed dark red.

"In wine there is truth," I said.

She raised the glass to her lips. When she lowered it the stain of wine glittered on her mouth.

"What is the truth?" she asked.

"That you are lonely," I said. "That you mourn golden days that can never be again."

A sob seemed to catch in her throat. "Never again?" she said.

"Not in the same way," I hastened to add. "The past has its place. Memories remain sacred, but one must somehow live."

I filled her glass again with wine. For a girl out of circulation for over two years she knocked off that wine like a champion.

"There are nights when I cannot sleep," she said. "Nights when I lie awake and hear strange noises in the dark."

"Loneliness," I said. "There is nothing more terrible than loneliness." As an alternative, Larakis offers himself as chosen comforter.

We ordered some food. I poured another glass of wine. In a little while bright patches of red adorned her cheeks, and her teeth gleamed even and white when she smiled.

"It seems so long," she said, "since I sat like this and tasted wine and talked a little."

"You are still young," I said. "You have your life ahead of you."

"And you?" she said. "You are young and have known loneliness. Is your life still ahead of you?"

"For both of us," I said.

She paused, and took another sip of wine. She held her head a little to the side, watching me intently.

"I am glad," she said.

There was a bright spring moon high over the city as we walked home together past the houses and the shops, and I did not even try to hold her hand.

After she had opened the door of her flat she stood in the doorway weaving just a little. The scent of midnight tables was about her body. Aroma of walnuts, wine, and fruit.

"Will you come in for coffee?" she said.

Her face was hidden in the shadows, and I could not see her eyes.

I was tempted, but as an expert in such matters I knew it was too soon. Timing in such situations is the principal thing.

"It is too late for you," I said. "You have been kind and I will not impose further on your kindness."

"You are a good and gentle man," she said.

She was right. Only fools mock at sin.

"Tomorrow night?" I said.

"Tomorrow night," she said. She closed the door.

A week passed. A week in which I saw the Widow Angela every night. Twice we ate in the little restaurant with the candles. Once we drove to an inn outside the city and ate beside a tree-shaded lake. Once we went to a film and it was a sad love story

and she cried. Several times after taking her home I stayed for a little midnight coffee. She showed me an album of family photographs. She had been a remarkably well-developed child. In later photographs I could not help being a little glad that I was not conducting this raid for plunder while her husband was alive. He looked a real brute of a man. I had no doubts, however, of my ability to equal or surpass his capacities in the main event.

All that week I never once tried to touch the Widow Angela. Several times in the last few nights I had the feeling she would not have objected too strongly if I had kissed her good night. I refuse to gamble for pennies when the chance of a gold piece is involved.

Late on Saturday afternoon it began to rain. I called at the grocer's carrying two bottles of dark wine that were wrapped as gifts. Mantaris stared at the bottles.

"Won't be long now," I said.

He glared at me and pulled fiercely at his nose. "Why don't you leave her alone?" he said. "Why not a woman of the street or some other wench? Why the Widow Angela?"

"She is the Rose of Sharon," I said, "and the Lily of the Valley."

"You are a goat," he said. "You hold nothing sacred."

"You are a poor loser," I said.

"In the end you will give up," he said. "You will get nowhere with her."

"I will not give up," I said. "I am getting somewhere very fast."

"Get out!" he said. "I spit back to your father's father!"

I looked round.

"You have no fresh cabbages today?" I said.

He got red in the face and started to splutter.

"It does not matter," I said. "Tonight I think I cut my own. Tonight, old man."

I heaped coals of fire upon his head. He stood there and did not say another word.

On my way to the Widow it began to rain again. I ran from the car to the stairs taking care not to drop the wine.

She stood smiling, waiting in the doorway. "Let me take your wet things," she said.

I gave her my raincoat and my hat. I carried the wine in myself. "A bad night," I said.

"It is very bad," she said.

"A good night to sit inside," I said. "The rain has chilled me."

She stood for a moment without answering and the light of the

lamp shone across her face. Her lips were red with a touch of lipstick and there were marks of rouge upon her cheeks.

" I don't mind," she said.

She brought a corkscrew and little decorative glasses for the wine. I opened one of the bottles. We sat together on the couch. We heard the whipping sound of wind and rain against the window.

" It has been a nice week," she said.

" I have enjoyed it very much," I said.

I refilled our glasses. We sat without speaking for a little while, with only our hands moving our glasses to our lips. The room seemed guarded like a valley between great mountains.

There was a gramophone in the corner. I got off the couch and walked to it and snapped the switch. The turntable revolved and the needle lowered on to a record. An old country mountain dance. Angela sat watching me from the couch.

" Come and dance," I said. " I have seen you dance before."

" Where? " she asked.

" At a picnic," I said. " You were taller than any woman in the line. You were beautiful and full of fire."

She stood up. The music rang the quick shrill melody. She came slowly to the machine. " I do not dance any more," she said.

" Why not? " I said.

" It is not right," she said.

I reached out and very gently touched the hair of the Widow Angela. I might have waited until she had more wine, but I was not made of stone. Besides, there was something—something in the way she stood. I knew this was the moment.

She turned her head slightly and my hand fell away. I saw her face with the sad dark eyes and the full lips like moist fruit before a hungry man.

" You must not touch me," she said.

I touched the nape of her neck, feeling the slight teasing softness of her hair across my fingers. " I want to touch you," I said, and I really meant it. " Angela, Angela, all my body wants to touch you."

I saw the first press of uncertain breathing stir her breasts. She knew I had seen and the tension of the moment heightened from her reaction. " It is not right," she said. Her hand moved uneasily to her cheek. " It is not right that he should lie in the cold ground and that I should be warm and flushed."

" You are not dead," I said. " Angela, you are not dead. You are a living, breathing woman. When you are dead you will be cold for ever. Till then you must live."

She turned from me as I spoke. She stood with her back to me, her face to the wall, and her hair glistened darkly.

I snapped off the gramophone. The dance died sharply and a quick silence took its place. There was wild anticipation in my belly. I knew I had her then. I knew by the way she stood and would not look at me. Weeping may endure for a day, but Larakis cometh in the evening.

I reached for her, and when she felt my hands she wantonly turned to meet me. I heard her breathing as if breathing were a punishment. Her eyes were closed and hollowed above her rouged cheeks. And as I pulled her to me she opened them and they were frenzied and uncaring.

I kissed her full lips. My mouth, hard upon hers, caught breath and the brazen scent of wine between us. The kiss broke and we shakenly drew breath. She stepped away for only a moment and then came back into my arms fiercely. I felt her fingers upon my face and on my throat and across my eyes. I stopped playing around. I started to pull her to the couch.

The buzzer rang, a sharp shrill sound.

I felt her stiffen, and I tried to catch my breath.

"We won't answer," I whispered. I caught her again. I reached for the great flowing hills of her breasts and felt them like fire beneath my hands.

Somebody pounded on the door.

We looked at each other, her face, pale and shaken, reflecting my own.

"We must answer," she said huskily. She stepped away, pulling weakly at her dress.

If I'd had a gun in my hand at that moment I would have emptied it through the door without caring who it was. Instead, I stumbled to it, cursing under my breath.

I flung it open and caught old Mantaris with his hand raised to pound again.

He looked startled and his mouth dropped open. The fierceness of my face must have scared blood out of him.

"What the hell do you want?" I roared.

He raised his hands in trembling defence. He stepped back and then looked round me quickly to where the Widow Angela stood. He spoke pleadingly to her, watching me from the corner of his eye.

"Good evening, Widow Angela," he said, and he reached down beside the door and brought up a large bag. "I am delivering your groceries."

I looked at him speechlessly. The Widow came closer to the door.

"Mr. Mantaris," she said, and her voice was still shaken. "I did not order any groceries."

The old man tried to look surprised and, in his excitement and fear, bounced up and down in the doorway.

"I was sure this was your order," he said. "Widow Angela, perhaps you forgot about this order."

"Are you crazy?" I said, and a strange unrest bit me. "She said she didn't order any groceries. Now get the hell away from here."

"Mike," the Widow Angela said reprovingly. She had regained her composure.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Mantaris," she said quietly. "There has been a mistake. I did not order any groceries."

The old man stopped bouncing, and the sweat crouched in little beads across his brown cheeks and forehead. "I am sorry. I am getting old," he said. "I became mixed up. Forgive me."

For the first time I looked at the bag of groceries. I almost choked. Right on the top, as bold as you please, was a cabbage!

That did it! I gave him a shove and slammed the door in his face.

I turned back to the Widow. I was confused but not discouraged. I had come so close that I refused to believe I could not make up the lost ground. I went to her again.

She greeted me with her elbows and a tight dark face.

"Angela," I said. "My darling, don't turn me away."

She shook her head. She stood like a stranger in the room. "It was wrong," she said. "If that old man had not accidentally come at the moment he did, it would have been wrong."

I watched her moist lips move as she spoke and remembered them soft under my own.

"You can't go to bed alone for ever," I said harshly.

She shook her head and her eyes were deep and clear. "Not for ever," she said. "When I find a man to love and marry who will love me, we will go to bed."

I heard her with the hearing of my ear and saw her with the seeing of my eye. There was a roaring beginning in my head and a sense of outrage in my loins. "You are crazy," I said.

"I was for a little while," she said. "I am all right now."

"I won't give you up."

"I will not see you," she said.

"I will make you see me."

"We can be friends," she said.

"Friends!" That word nearly choked me.

Her face was set into hard firm lines. She wore her virtue like a coat of armour.

I'd had enough. A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps. While I was missing from the couch, the fire burnt out.

"Good-bye," she said.

I stood there a moment. Nimrod, the mighty hunter, returning with an empty pouch. "My hat and coat," I said haughtily.

She turned to get them, and I took one last mournful look at her strong, fine thighs and the slender turn of her trim ankles. She brought me my things. She walked to the door and opened it. I walked past her and turned in the doorway, standing in the very place where that sneaky old bastard had stood.

"Angela," I said. "You are doing us both wrong."

She turned, walked out of the room, and left me in the doorway with the door still open. If she had at least closed the door or pushed me out—but she left me standing there.

With what dignity I could muster I reached in and closed the door in my own face. I turned and walked down the stairs.

In the car I debated between throwing a brick through the window of the Mantaris grocery or going to Crotty's bar. I decided on the bar. If I hurried, I knew a cigarette girl there that I might talk into taking the night off. She had a squeaky giggle and an unfortunate tendency to cold feet, but any port in a storm.

To hell with the Widow Angela!

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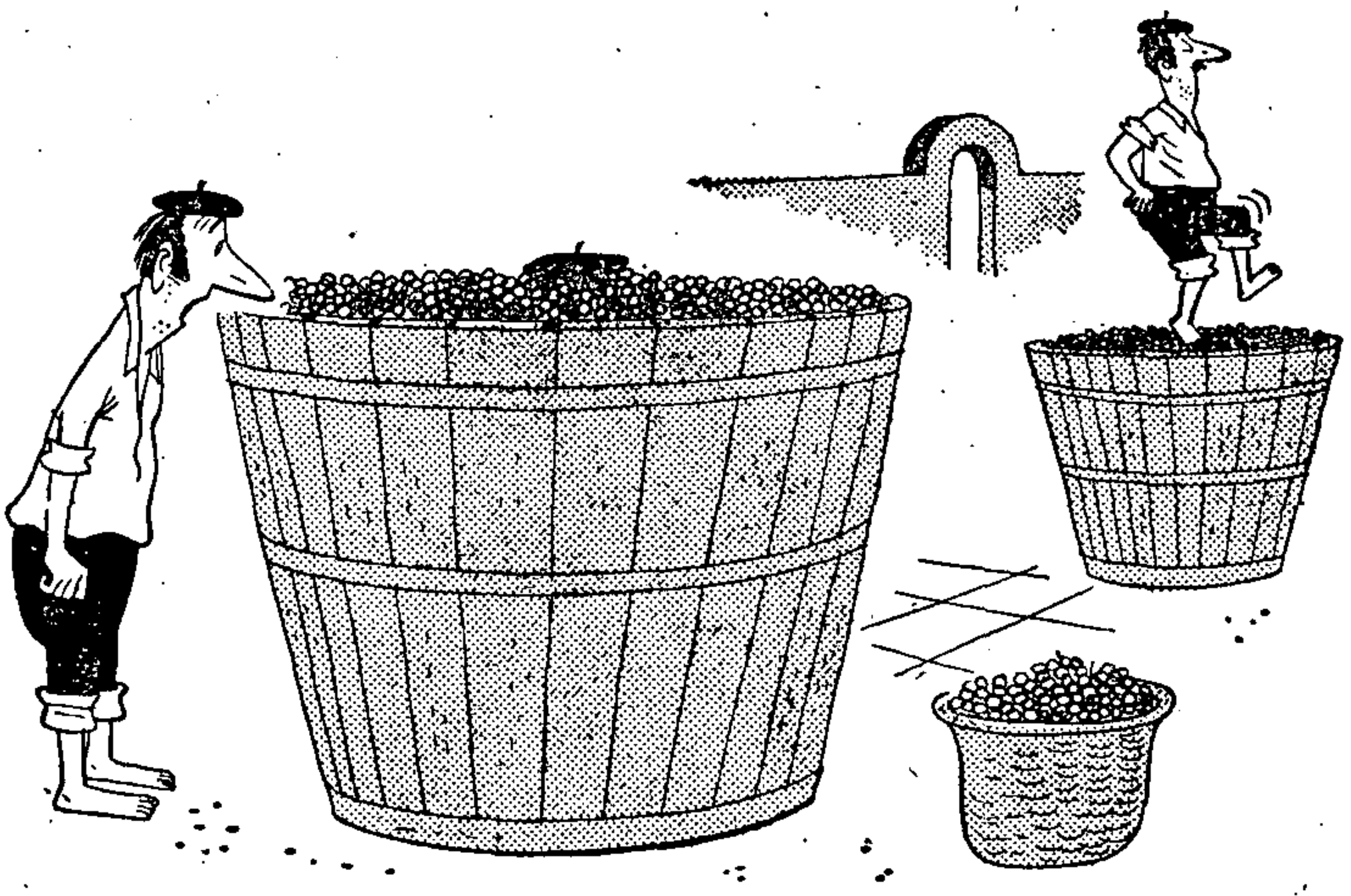

"Pierre! Are you there, Pierre?"

ISLAND OF EYES

The pulsing grey mass rolled towards us, inch by inch

BY STUART CLOETE

IT was easy to see how glad Jimmy Fothergill was to be back at Burns Point. There was a spring in his step and his eyes were bright as a bird's. It made me feel good just to watch him.

This was the scene of the experiment in genetics that had put him among the top men in his field. It had to do with fall-out, with possible mutations, with all that side of atomic warfare that scares everyone who isn't a scientist, and quite a few people who are.

Fothergill's experiment had been with rats—an animal said to resemble man in many ways—and it was successful. He proved, among other things, that there is no danger to man as things stand today.

Jim had done the work here, and had now come back for a holiday. He was staying in the same room at the Burns Point Hotel that he had had when he left the island at the end of the experiment three years before.

You could see Bob's Island from the window. The *Robert Burns*, a troopship that had gone down in 1897, had given both the village and the island their names. It was just another of those little islands and parent villages that dot the African coast and are so small that they hardly show even on large-scale maps.

Bob's Island had been a rather curious place for a man to choose to isolate himself. There were some old stone buildings, once used as a prison, that had been kept in reasonable repair. There was a good spring and, above all, there was privacy. Burns Point was very hard to reach, the road being bad even for Africa. Most important of all, Jim liked the place.

If a man is to be stuck in one place for a year and a half, with a single companion and an unspecified number of white rats, it should be a place that he likes.

Another reason was that his boyhood friend, Herman Le Roux, lived at Burns Point, and was willing to help him. He was a fisherman, with a mystic love of solitude. Queer in the head some thought him, but he and Fothergill had never lost

touch with each other. Fothergill told him to get the stores they'd need to repair the old buildings, build cages, and so on. Then, when everything was ready, he came with his rats, something like twenty-five pairs, and with the stuff, packed in lead, that had been sent to him from the United States.

The whole business was very hush-hush and still is. No one except Fothergill and some of the other top men know the whole story. I only came into the business at the end and, although I knew Jim very well, I had never paid much attention to his scientific talk. It was above my head. Mendel's genetics with white and mauve peas I understood in a vague way, but nuclear fission was beyond me; and the combination of the two I left to the bright boys like Jim and Einstein . . .

When he arrived at Burns Point, Fothergill spent some days walking around the country with Le Roux, talking about Bob's Island, and fishing. He was the kind of chap who overworked, blunting his brain on his job, and then went into the wilds to sharpen it up again. Not to kill things. I never knew him kill a bird or a buck unless he needed food. But he liked to watch game, watch any wild thing—birds, porpoises, seals. He was a different man then, my best friend once more, until he escaped again into the fourth-dimensional world of his professional interests. That was why he sent for me to join him. He was relaxed with me.

Having a holiday. Join me Burns Point. Fothergill. That was the way the telegram read. I hadn't seen him for three years. He had been back to America. I had met him before he left but only for lunch at The Mount Nelson in Cape Town. That was after this experiment was concluded. I remember him saying that he had left Le Roux to finish things up on the island, to pack the gear, and kill the last of the rats.

"The last?" I said.

"Yes, fifty or so."

"That many?" I asked.

"Yes." Then he added, "Do you know how fast rats breed?"

"No."

"They breed at three or four months and have litters of six or eight," he informed me.

I agreed it was fast. If one female had four litters of eight in a year, that was thirty-two. And then four months after they were born the females of the first litter could have eight babies, and four months after they were born *they* could have eight, and then there were the others . . .

I gave it up, having no gift for mathematics.

"In two years," Jim said, "the descendants of a single couple

could run into thousands. You ought to have seen the cages we had," he said. "Hundreds of white bellies and little pink feet clinging to the wire like white lice. All of them pedigreed.

"I tell you," he said, "I knew every rat. They were all tattooed and numbered. Sometimes I still dream of rats! The pink feet, the scaly tails—and the smell! That rat house stank," he said, "no matter how clean we kept it. And you got the stink on your hands, on your clothes, and in your hair."

I had never seen Jim so disturbed. But this, as I say, was three years ago. Now I was going to see him again and I was excited about it. There was something very special about Jim Fothergill. A kind of electric field, an aura of some kind. Everyone felt it—women particularly, which was perhaps why he avoided them.

Not only did he have brains, personality, and a world-wide reputation, but he was good-looking. Jim was tall, dark, slim. His eyes were brown. He moved like a boxer on the balls of his feet. Even when he sat silently, you were aware of him—as he sat when I walked into his room in the hotel.

I thought then that he was like a sheathed dagger. When he rose he seemed to draw himself out of the scabbard of his lethargy.

"Glad you're here," he said, and took my hand. He gave me a drink, a cigarette, and said, "Now we'll go to Le Roux. He wants to see you, too."

"Why can't he join us here?" I asked. I had expected him to be with Jim.

"He's ill. Went down yesterday with something, so we'll have to go to his place. He'll not be able to come to the island with us."

Le Roux seemed glad to see me. There was no doubt about his being too ill to join in our project. I say our, but of course it was Jim's plan.

Three of us had intended to spend a couple of days camping on the island. Well, now the two of us would. The boat, camp kit, and provisions were ready.

"Now we'll really get a chance to talk," Jim said.

And he was right, in a way. Two or three men alone, out in the silence of the bush, can talk. They can do more. Under the stars, they communicate without words and come very close to each other. This was our bond with Le Roux. I had been out with them before, when we were boys, and I had stayed with Jim's people at Burns Point where they had a summer cottage.

Le Roux, who was running a high temperature, was in a

mystical mood, talking about the brotherhood of all living things. Even killing sharks seemed to worry him when he was in this feverish condition.

We left Le Roux still muttering to himself, and finished our preparations.

We decided to leave after breakfast on the following day and spend two or three nights on the island. Jim had found a good boat which we could easily handle ourselves; so when we had everything checked, down to the last few little odds and ends that may make the difference between comfort and discomfort when camping, we went back to the hotel for dinner.

Bob's Island was about three miles from the coast, and usually the channel was fairly calm. Few people ever went to the island. The fishing there was poor, and it really had no other attraction. There were a lot of rock-rabbits, or dassies, there, and seagulls nested on the cliffs that formed its western edge. No one ever camped there because it was believed to be haunted by prisoners who had been ill-treated in the ancient gaol and, worse still, by the British soldiers who had gone down in the *Robert Burns* in '97.

This had been one of those tragic and very British disasters which, born of someone's error, ended up as a saga of romance and courage. The ship was a troopship. She had gone down slowly. Had there been boats enough everyone could have been saved. Instead, only a handful of women and civilians reached the shore.

The troops lined up on deck and went down presenting arms, with the band playing *God Save the Queen.*

All this was in my mind as we chugged out to sea—how could it not have been, since it had happened here? I was wondering how those soldiers, many of them only boys, had felt seeing dark fins cutting through the water . . .

It was a long time since I had been to Bob's Island, but I missed one thing.

"I don't see any gulls," I said. "There used to be a lot of birds."

"There were birds here three years ago," Jim said. "Gulls, terns, cormorants—even a pair of black oyster-catchers."

By this time we were in the sandy bay where we could anchor the boat and off-load our gear.

It took us about an hour to put our kit in the old building that Jim had made his home when he and Le Roux had lived here. Once we had everything settled we started on a walk round the island.

I was rather surprised at seeing no rock-rabbits. The grass

which they had kept as smooth as a lawn was longish and dotted with small tussocks that made walking quite difficult. On the beach, when we climbed down to it, I found perfect skeletons of a dog, three sea birds, and a young seal. In each case the flesh was stripped from the bones, and the bones themselves bleached white by exposure to the sun and wind. The skeletons lay among the great dried smoky tubes of kelp that we call sea bamboo, with rotted sponges, and other flotsam along the contour of the last high spring-tide.

I visualized the storm—the curding seas and all this refuse flung into the dry sands of the wind-swept dunes and abandoned there by the retreating waves. Birds dashed to their death, the seal caught somehow unawares and crushed against a rock.

Suddenly it struck me. How often had I walked along a sandy beach? A hundred times? A thousand? And how many skeletons had I ever seen? I could number no skeletons. Usually, on a beach, if one found anything dead it was partially destroyed, dessicated, putrid.

Then Jim said something. He said, "Funny. There being so many hawks about."

First we had commented on the lack of birds—the sea birds we were accustomed to seeing here—and now we noticed the hawks, biggish ones, drifting round in aimless circles in the sky above us. Jim had noticed them first, because he walked, looking upwards, with his head in the air, while I looked down at the ground. Perhaps this pointed the difference between us. Neither of us said anything more, nor did we draw any conclusions from what we had seen.

We continued to walk and talk about our boyhood, about the war, about Jim's experiences in the States. We went back over the years, and regained our old intimacy.

We said nothing important. I do not remember anything Jim said about America or about his experiments but, by the time we had walked round the island and reached the old prison again, it was almost dark, and the years of our separation had disappeared in those few hours.

There was plenty of dry driftwood, left over from the time Jim and Le Roux had lived here, piled against the wall. Big baulks, bits of broken bulkheads, planks, and odd chunks that might have been anything. I started a fire.

Jim undid the bed-rolls and inflated the rubber mattresses with a little pump. He decided on a tin of baked beans each, with two fried eggs and coffee for our supper. We had bread, butter, and cheese to fill up with if we were still hungry.

The fire burnt well, and it was pleasant sitting in that old

stone gaol with firelight flickering on the walls. Some of the ships' timbers had copper nails in them which gave out a beautiful green light as they burnt.

We opened a couple of bottles of beer and lit cigarettes. We were pleasantly tired, sleepy with the strong sea air and the exercise. The wind was getting up, the way it does at the Cape of Good Hope; but a big storm was unlikely, and we had brought enough food for a week. It was wonderful to be right out of the world for a few days.

"America must seem a long way off tonight, Jim," I said.

"Everywhere's a long way off," he said: "That's why I wanted to come here with you and Le Roux. No letters. No phone calls. No hands can reach out for you: hands, picking up the phone; hands, writing the letters. All communication is a matter of hands. You are defenceless against them."

"Well," I said, "no one can reach us here, with this wind blowing. I hope the boat's all right."

"Don't worry," he said. "That cove is safe from both the north-west and the south-east gales."

I relaxed again. After all, he'd lived here for almost two years and ought to know. I threw my cigarette into the fire, and broke four eggs into the frying-pan with some butter. They were sizzling nicely, going white and browning round the edges, when I suddenly felt uneasy, as if I was being watched.

I looked at Jim to see if he was aware of anything, but he was miles away, staring into the fire, building one of his genetic castles in the air.

I looked back at my eggs. I concentrated on them. The whites were almost done now. The yolks no longer wobbled.

The feeling of being watched increased and I was afraid to look round. My nature is somewhat timid, particularly after dark. I think I must have been frightened by the ghost stories my nurse told me as a child. That, at least, was the way I tried to rationalize my fears. But I could not go on cooking the eggs any longer. I forced myself to look round.

Something was there all right. A thousand rubies glimmered and shone in the firelight. They were in pairs, set two by two. They were eyes.

A log fell and burnt up with a shower of sparks. Then I saw what it was: the red eyes of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of white rats were staring at us.

There was a wide border of them a yard or more wide, round the room—like a great, dull white carpet. More rats were pouring in through the open door.

I picked up the flashlight. " Jim, look! " I said.

He turned as I switched on the light. The beam shot across the big room, across our bed-rolls, across the bare stone-flagged floor and then, widening, it hit the rats, lighting up a seething wedge of them.

First, they turned away from it in fear, and then faced it; their red eyes staring. Some stood on their hind legs, their pink forepaws dangling like tiny hands. Some bared their long rodent teeth as they squeaked in anger. Their bodies were not white and clean, like the rats one sees in pet shops, but yellowish, stained, and blotched with dirt like the teeth and beard of an old man who is a heavy smoker.

Jim said, " I told him to kill them! I told him to kill the ones that were left over. I killed most of them and asked him to deal with the rest."

" Told who? " I said.

" Le Roux."

I said, " You should have known he'd never do it. They were pets, weren't they? I mean, he took care of them, didn't he? "

" Yes."

Our talking and the flashlight excited the rats. As I moved the beam they ebbed and flowed in a furious tide, pushing and shoving, squeaking, fighting, coming towards us and then retreating again.

I took a burning brand from the fire and flung it into the middle of the rats opposite us. They were about fifteen feet away. Several were hurt—burnt or damaged by the log I had thrown. There was a smell of burning flesh and hair.

But the instant a rat went down, the others were on to it, eating it alive. They piled into each other two, three, and four deep. At times the heap must have been a foot high. Those at the bottom, wounded or not, were attacked and eaten by those on top.

I switched off my light. Until my eyes became adjusted I could see nothing, but I could hear the rustling of the rats' movement. I felt them coming nearer. It was only a matter of time before one of them, bolder or more ravenous than the others, made the first rushing leap. Then, within seconds, they would be all over us in a relentless, savage, white, biting wave.

The rats were chattering now, chattering and squeaking. It's the build-up, I thought. They are working themselves up to attack. I switched on the light again.

They were nearer to us. The little sea of floor that—as if we were an island—separated us from the rats was smaller.

The eyes of those nearest to us blazed with fury and hunger.

I could look into their blood-red eyes. Their ears were like little pink shells. Their whiskers twitched.

Those on the outside of the semicircle that was closing in on us, jumped up and down on their forelegs, half rearing like restive horses. Here and there one stood up like a tiny bear, as if to see better.

I was paralysed with fright. Frozen, where I sat. My mind blank, except that it registered absurd observations about the behaviour of the rats in a quite objective manner—as if they had nothing to do with me—which, even as I did it, I realized was a form of escape-mechanism. These observations were all that stood between me and panic.

In the darkness the thick grey carpet kept pulsing, unrolling towards us, inch by inch. Once again I drove them back with a whip of the flashlight. But it no longer really frightened them, and they shuffled forward again as soon as I moved the beam.

Jim said, " I left twenty-five rats for Le Roux to kill." Then he added, " And that's why there are no dassies or birds. They followed the rock-rabbits into their holes. They killed the nesting gulls and ate their young and eggs. Then they lived on each other and what was washed up by the storms on to the beach."

I thought of the dog's skeleton and the seal and birds. I should have known they meant something.

" Why didn't we see any? " I asked.

" The hawks. They are afraid of them in the daytime."

This was Jim's escape into science, into working out how they had lived and increased. Here we were, facing a horrible death, in danger of being eaten alive, and talking as if we had all the time in the world before us.

Then Jim made up his mind. " The boat," he said. " We'll run for it. Break up the bread and the cheese into bits. We'll throw the food among them and then run for it."

I started breaking up the bread and cutting the cheese into chunks. I cut the bacon rashers in half, too. Jim was getting two good thick branches from the fire.

" We'll each take one," he said. " You lead with the flash-light, and don't stop to brush them off if they get on to you. Just watch your throat."

I began to throw the food. I threw it fast but spaced my throws to the rats' reactions. As soon as a chunk of bread landed, the rats were on it in a fighting heap. Once they were really engaged, I threw another piece. I threw them all away from the door, which thinned them out in that direction.

What I had hoped would happen, actually took place. At

each spot where the food had been thrown the rats milled around in little whirlpools, attacking each other, and then falling upon those that were badly hurt and tearing them to pieces.

" Now," Jim shouted, " now! "

We sprang up and, shining the light on the doorway, I ran towards it, striking out right and left with my fiery brand.

I trod on some of the rats and almost fell. I could feel some clinging to my trousers. One bit me in the thigh. Another reached my belt, but I brushed it off.

Then we were through the door and out. Now, in the open, we could make more speed and could not be pulled down so easily. We were safe.

Scattered rats were moving across the grass towards the prison. They were coming from all directions as if some message had gone out to them; but, sensing us, they changed direction and came towards us.

Turning to look back I saw the rats in the gaol pouring out of the doorway as if it was a funnel, and fanning out. We should not be safe till we were in the boat.

The moon was up now. It came from behind a cloud. The little bay was only a hundred yards away. We were safe as long as neither of us fell, as long as the boat was there and had not broken away.

We reached the beach. The boat was safe, bobbing about in the tiny cove. I hauled on the line to bring her in. We jumped on board and pushed off as the first rats reached the shore.

Now, in the moonlight, they looked even more menacing as they came on in their thousands to the very edge of the sea.

The wind had changed. The boat tended to drift towards the beach, and we had to keep pushing her off with the oars.

A wave of rats started swimming towards us, in spite of the rough water. They swam round the boat till they were drowned or washed back to the shore, where the others fell upon them. Some now came towards us, clinging upside down to the rope that held us anchored. We beat them off with the oars.

Clouds drifted over the moon, leaving us in darkness. Then the moonlight was bright again. I kept wondering whether it was worse to see the rats or not to see them.

At last the sky paled into dawn. As the sun rose the rats thinned till by sun-up none was left. Nothing remained of them but the clean-picked skeletons of their dead and the myriad spoor that patterned the wet sand with tiny prints.

Jim, who had hardly spoken all night, said, " Now we can go ashore."

" Ashore! Man, you're mad. We'll be eaten alive."

"No, we won't," Jim said, pointing upwards where the big chicken hawks were beginning to circle, their shadows falling on the grass as they came between earth and sun.

I did not have Jim's confidence in the hawks.

"What are we going to do ashore?" I inquired.

"Get food. What they've left of it," he said. "The tins, with luck. The blankets and water. We may have to spend our nights on the boat for a few days unless the wind drops. We can sleep on the beach in the daytime," he added.

He might be able to. I didn't think I could. But what he said about the food made sense. I followed him ashore.

The food was much as we had left it. There were the charred remains of the burning chunks of wood I had thrown. There was a strong smell of rats. Naturally, everything that was not in tins had been eaten, but the tins of corned beef and baked beans were untouched. Starving rats would be capable of biting through them in time, but they had not stayed long after we had left. It was us, fresh meat and blood, they were after.

We put everything into the blankets, filled the kettle with water at the spring, and went back to the beach. It was hard to believe I had not dreamt all this—that it was not a nightmare.

We lit a fire and heated some beans. Jim went to sleep, lying down in comfort. I just sat there, dozing off at intervals and waking up in terror. By afternoon the wind had dropped. When Jim woke he said we could make it back. The sea was still choppy, but I would have taken any risk to get away.

It was six o'clock when we staggered off the dock at Burns Point. We had been away thirty hours, but it might have been thirty years. A lifetime separated today from the day before.

Jim remarked, "Well, it proves one thing, anyway."

"What's that?" I asked, thinking he would say that if you want a thing done properly you must do it yourself.

But all he said was, "No mutation of any kind in all those thousands. Every rat was absolutely normal. I was sure before, but even with everything we did there was always the possibility of some error somewhere. So it was really a bit of luck that old Le Roux was sentimental about his pets."

That was when I knew that I was not cut out to be a scientist like my friend Jim.

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★ ★ ★

HIGHLY STRUNG

***Harp:** a musical instrument that requires little skill but a lot of pluck.*

★ *This month's Argosy reprint by readers' special request is a favourite Welsh story by brilliant science-fiction author John Wyndham, here temporarily deserting triffids for dragons!*

CHINESE PUZZLE

BY JOHN WYNDHAM

THE parcel, waiting provocatively on the dresser, was the first thing that Hwyl noticed when he got in from work.

"From Dai, is it?" he inquired of his wife.

"Yes, indeed. Japanese, the stamps are," she told him.

He went across to examine it. It was the shape a small hatbox might be, about ten inches each way. The address: Mr. & Mrs. Hwyl Hughes, Ty Derwen, Llynllawn, Llangolwgcoch, Brecknockshire, S. Wales, was lettered carefully, for the clear understanding of foreigners. The other label, also hand-lettered, but in red, was quite clear, too. It said: EGGS—*Fragile—With Great Care.*

"There is funny to send eggs so far," Hwyl said. "Plenty of eggs we are having. Might be chocolate eggs, I think?"

"Come you to your tea, man," Bronwen told him. "All day I have been looking at that old parcel, and a little longer it can wait now."

Hwyl sat down at the table and began his meal. From time to time, however, his eyes strayed again to the parcel.

"If it is real eggs they are, careful you should be," he remarked. "Reading in a book I was once how in China they keep eggs for years. Bury them in the earth, they do, for a delicacy. There is strange for you, now. Queer they are in China, and not like Wales, at all."

Bronwen contented herself with saying that perhaps Japan was not like China, either.

When the meal had been finished and cleared, the parcel was transferred to the table. Hwyl snipped the string and pulled off the brown paper. Within was a tin box which, when the sticky tape holding its lid had been removed, proved to be full to the brim with sawdust. Mrs. Hughes fetched a sheet of newspaper,

and prudently covered the table-top. Hwyl dug his fingers into the sawdust.

"Something there, there is," he announced.

"There is stupid you are. Of course there is something there," Bronwen said, slapping his hand out of the way.

She trickled some of the sawdust out on to the newspaper, and then felt inside the box herself. Whatever it was, it felt much too large for an egg. She poured out more sawdust and felt again. This time, her fingers encountered a piece of paper. She pulled it out and laid it on the table: a letter in Dafydd's handwriting. Then she put in her hand once more, got her fingers under the object, and lifted it gently out.

"Well, indeed! Look at that now! Did you ever?" she exclaimed. "Eggs, he was saying, is it?"

They both regarded it with astonishment for some moments.

"So big it is. Queer, too," said Hwyl at last.

"What kind of bird to lay such an egg?" said Bronwen.

"Ostrich, perhaps?" suggested Hwyl.

But Bronwen shook her head. She had once seen an ostrich's egg in a museum, and remembered it well enough to know that it had little in common with this. The ostrich's egg had been a little smaller, round, with a creamy white and highly-polished surface. But this was a large oval, and practically transparent; it had a lustre to it, a nacreous kind of beauty.

"A pearl, could it be?" she said, in an awed voice.

"There is silly you are," said her husband. "From an oyster as big as Llangolwgcoch Town Hall, you are thinking?"

He burrowed into the tin again, but "Eggs," it seemed, had been a manner of speaking: there was no other, nor room for one.

Bronwen put some of the sawdust into one of her best china vegetable-dishes, and bedded the egg carefully on top of it. Then they sat down to read their son's letter:

S.S. Tudor Maid,
Kobe.

Dear Mam and Dad,

I expect you will be surprised about the enclosed I was too. It is a funny looking thing I expect they have funny birds in China after all they have Pandas so why not. We found a small sampan about a hundred miles off the China coast that had bust its mast and should never have tried and all except two of them were dead they are all dead now. But one of them that wasn't dead then was holding this egg-thing all wrapped up in a padded coat like it was a baby only I didn't know it was an egg then not till later.

One of them died coming aboard but this other one lasted two

days longer in spite of all I could do for him which was my best. I was sorry nobody here can speak Chinese because he was a nice little chap and lonely and knew he was a goner but there it is. And when he saw it was nearly all up he gave me this egg and talked very faint but I'd not have understood anyway. All I could do was take it and hold it careful the way he had and tell him I'd look after it which he couldn't understand either. Then he said something else and looked very worried and died poor chap.

So here it is. I know it is an egg because when I took him a boiled egg once he pointed to both of them to show me but nobody on board knows what kind of egg. But seeing I promised him I'd keep it safe I am sending it to you to keep for me as this ship is no place to keep anything safe anyway and hope it doesn't get cracked on the way too.

Hoping this finds you as it leaves me and love to all and you special. *Dai.*

"Well, there is strange for you, now," said Mrs. Hughes, as she finished reading. "And *looking* like an egg it is, indeed—the shape of it," she conceded. "But the colours are not. There is pretty they are. Like you see when oil is on the road in the rain. But never an egg like that have I seen in my life. Flat the colour is on eggs, and not to shine."

Hwyl went on looking at it thoughtfully.

"Yes. There is beautiful," he agreed, "but what use?"

"Use, is it, indeed!" said his wife. "A trust, it is, and sacred, too. Dying the poor man was, and our Dai gave him his word. I am thinking of how we will keep it safe for him till he will be back, now."

They both contemplated the egg awhile.

"Very far away, China is," Bronwen remarked, obscurely.

Several days passed, however, before the egg was removed from display on the dresser. Word quickly went round the valley about it, and the callers would have felt slighted had they been unable to see it. Bronwen thought that continually getting it out and putting it away again would be more hazardous than leaving it on exhibition.

Almost everyone found the sight of it rewarding. Idris Bowen who lived three houses away was practically alone in his divergent view.

"The shape of an egg, it has," he allowed. "But careful you should be, Mrs. Hughes. A fertility symbol it is, I am thinking, and stolen, too, likely."

"Mr. Bowen—" began Bronwen indignantly.

"Oh, by the men in that boat, Mrs. Hughes. Refugees from China they would be, see. Traitors to the Chinese people. And running away with all they could carry, before the glorious army of the workers and peasants could catch them, too. Always the same, it is, as you will be seeing when the revolution comes to Wales."

"Oh, dear, dear! There is funny you are, Mr. Bowen. Propaganda you will make out of an old boot, I think," said Bronwen.

Idris Bowen frowned.

"Funny, I am not, Mrs. Hughes. And propaganda there is *in an honest boot, too,*" he told her as he left with dignity.

By the end of a week practically everyone in the village had seen the egg and been told no, Mrs. Hughes did not know what kind of a creature had laid it, and the time seemed to have come to store it away safely against Dafydd's return. There were not many places in the house where she could feel sure that it would rest undisturbed.

On consideration, the airing-cupboard seemed as likely as any, so Bronwen put it back on what sawdust was left in the tin, and stowed it in there.

It remained there for a month, out of sight, and pretty much out of mind until a day when Hwyl returning from work discovered his wife sitting at the table with a disconsolate expression on her face, and a bandage on her finger. She looked relieved to see him.

"Hatched, it is," she observed.

The blankness of Hwyl's expression was irritating to one who had had a single subject on her mind all day. "Dai's egg," she explained. "Hatched out, it is, I am telling you."

"Well, there is a thing for you, now!" said Hwyl. "A nice little chicken, is it?"

"A chicken it is not, at all. A monster, indeed, and nipping me it is, too." She held out her finger.

She explained that this morning she had gone to the airing-cupboard to take out a clean towel and, as she put her hand in, something had nipped her finger, painfully.

Then she had noticed that the lid was off the tin, and the shell of the egg there was all broken to pieces.

"How is it to see?" Hwyl asked.

Bronwen admitted that she had not seen it well. She had had a glimpse of a long, greeny-blue tail protruding from behind a pile of sheets, and then it had looked at her over the top of them, glaring at her. On that, it had seemed to her more the kind of a job a man should deal with, so she had slammed the door, and gone to bandage her finger.

" Still there, then, is it?" said Hwyl.

She nodded.

" Right you. Have a look at it, we will, now then," he said, decisively.

He started to leave the room, but on second thoughts turned back to collect a pair of heavy working-gloves. Bronwen did not offer to accompany him.

Presently there was a scuffle of his feet, an exclamation or two, then his tread descending the stairs. He came in, shutting the door behind him with his foot. He set the creature he was carrying down on the table, and for some seconds it crouched there, blinking, but otherwise unmoving.

" Scared, he was, I think," Hwyl remarked.

In the body, the creature bore some resemblance to a lizard—a large lizard, over a foot long. The scales of its skin, however, were much bigger, and some of them curled up and stood out here and there, in a fin-like manner. And the head was quite unlike a lizard's, being much rounder, with a wide mouth, broad nostrils and, over-all, a slightly pushed-in effect, in which were set a pair of goggling red eyes. About the neck, and also making a kind of mane, were curious, streamer-like attachments with the suggestion of locks of hair which had permanently cohered. The colour was mainly green, shot with blue, and having a metallic shine to it, but there were brilliant red markings about the head and in the lower parts of the locks. There were touches of red, too, where the legs joined the body, and on the feet, where the toes finished in sharp yellow claws. Altogether, a surprisingly vivid and exotic creature.

It eyed Bronwen Hughes for a moment, turned a baleful look on Hwyl, and then started to run about the table-top, looking for a way off. The Hughes watched it for a moment or two, and then regarded one another.

" Well, there is nasty for you, indeed," observed Bronwen.

" Nasty it may be. But beautiful it is, too, look," said Hwyl.

" Ugly old face to have," Bronwen remarked.

" Yes, indeed. But fine colours, too, see. Glorious they are, like Technicolor, I am thinking," Hwyl said.

The creature appeared to have half a mind to leap from the table. Hwyl leaned forward and caught hold of it. It wriggled, and tried to get its head round to bite him, but discovered he was holding it too near the neck for that. It paused in its struggles. Then, suddenly, it snorted. Two jets of flame and a puff of smoke came from its nostrils. Hwyl dropped it abruptly, partly from alarm, but more from surprise. Bronwen gave a squeal, and climbed hastily on to her chair.

The creature itself seemed a trifle astonished. For a few seconds it stood turning its head and waving the sinuous tail that was quite as long as its body. Then it scuttled across to the hearth-rug, and curled itself up in front of the fire.

"By dammo! There was a thing for you!" Hwyl exclaimed, regarding it a trifle nervously. "Fire there was with it, I think. I will like to understand that, now."

"Fire indeed, and smoke, too," Bronwen agreed. "There is shocking it was, and not natural, at all."

She looked uncertainly at the creature. It had so obviously settled itself for a nap that she risked stepping down from the chair, but she kept on watching it, ready to jump up again if it should move. Then:

"Never did I think I will see one of those. And not sure it is right to have in the house, either," she said.

"What is it you are meaning, now?" Hwyl asked, puzzled.

"Why, a dragon, indeed," Bronwen told him.

Hwyl stared at her.

"Dragon!" he exclaimed. "There is foolish—" Then he stopped. He looked at it again, and then down at the place where the flame had scorched his glove. "No, by dammo!" he said. "Right, you. A dragon it is, I believe."

They both regarded it with some apprehension.

"Glad, I am, not to live in China," observed Bronwen.

Those who were privileged to see the creature during the next day or two supported almost to a man the theory that it was a dragon. This, they established by poking sticks through the wire-netting of the hutch that Hwyl had made for it until it obliged with a resentful huff of flame. Even Mr. Jones, the Chapel, did not doubt its authenticity, though on the propriety of its presence in his community he preferred to reserve judgment for the present. After a short time, however, Bronwen Hughes put an end to the practice of poking it. For one thing, she felt responsible to Dai for its well-being, for another, it was beginning to develop an irritable disposition, and a liability to emit flame without cause; for yet another, and although Mr. Jones' decision on whether it could be considered as one of God's creatures or not was still pending, she felt that in the meantime it deserved equal rights with other dumb animals. So she put a card on the hutch saying: *Please not to Tease*, and most of the time was there to see that it was heeded.

Almost all Llynllawn, and quite a few people from Llangolwgcoch, came to see it. Sometimes they would stand for an hour or more, hoping to see it huff. If it did, they went off satisfied

that it was a dragon; but if it maintained a contented, non-fire-breathing mood, they went and told their friends that it was really no more than a little old lizard, though big, mind you.

Idris Bowen was an exception to both categories. It was not until his third visit that he was privileged to see it snort, but even then he remained unconvinced.

" Unusual, it is, yes," he admitted. " But a dragon it is not. Look you at the dragon of Wales, or the dragon of St. George, now. To huff fire is something, I grant you, but wings, too, a dragon must be having, or a dragon he is not."

But that was the kind of cavilling that could be expected from Idris, and disregarded.

After ten days or so of crowded evenings, however, interest slackened. Once one had seen the dragon and exclaimed over the brilliance of its colouring, there was little to add, beyond being glad that it was in the Hughes' house rather than one's own, and wondering how big it would eventually grow. For, really, it did not do much but sit and blink and perhaps give a little huff of flame if you were lucky. So, presently, the Hughes' home became more their own again.

And, no longer pestered by visitors, the dragon showed an equable disposition. It never huffed at Bronwen, and seldom at Hwyl. Bronwen's first feeling of antagonism passed quickly, and she found herself growing attached to it. She fed it, and looked after it, and found that on a diet consisting chiefly of minced horseflesh and dog-biscuits it grew with astonishing speed. Most of the time, she let it run free in the room. To quieten the misgivings of callers she would explain:

" Friendly, he is, and pretty ways he has with him, if there is not teasing. Sorry for him, I am, too, for bad it is to be an only child, and an orphan worse still. And less than an orphan, he is, see. Nothing of his own sort he is knowing, nor likely, either. So very lonely he is being, poor thing, I think."

But, inevitably, there came an evening when Hwyl, looking thoughtfully at the dragon, remarked, " Outside you, soon. There is too big for the house you are getting, see."

Bronwen was surprised to find how unwilling she felt about that.

" Very good and quiet, he is," she said. " There is clever he is to tuck his tail away not to trip people, too. And clean with the house he is, also, and no trouble. Always out to the yard at proper times. Right as clockwork."

" Behaving well, he is, indeed," Hwyl agreed. " But growing so fast, now. More room he will be needing, see. A fine hutch for him in the yard, and with a run to it, I think."

The advisability of that was demonstrated a week later when Bronwen came down one morning to find the end of the wooden hutch charred away, the carpet and rug smouldering, and the dragon comfortably curled up in Hwyl's easy chair.

"Settled, it is, and lucky indeed not to burn in our bed. Out you," Hwyl told the dragon. "A fine thing to burn a man's house for him, and not grateful, either. For shame, I am telling you."

The insurance-man who came to inspect the damage thought similarly. "Notified, you should have," he told Bronwen. "A fire-risk, he is, you see."

Bronwen protested that the policy made no mention of dragons.

"No, indeed," the man admitted, "but a normal hazard he is not, either. Inquire, I will, from Head Office how it is, see. But better to turn him out before more trouble, and thankful, too."

So, a couple of days later, the dragon was occupying a larger hutch, constructed of asbestos sheets, in the yard. There was a wire-netted run in front of it, but most of the time Bronwen locked the gate, and left the back door of the house open so that he could come and go as he liked. In the morning he would trot in, and help Bronwen by huffing the kitchen fire into a blaze, but apart from that he had learnt not to huff in the house. The only times he was any bother to anyone were the occasions when he set his straw on fire in the night so that the neighbours got up to see if the house was burning, and were somewhat short about it the next day.

Hwyl kept a careful account of the cost of feeding him, and hoped that it was not running into more than Dai would be willing to pay. Otherwise, his only worries were his failure to find a cheap, non-inflammable bedding-stuff, and speculation on how big the dragon was likely to grow before Dai would return to take him off his hands. Very likely all would have gone smoothly until that happened, but for the unpleasantness with Idris Bowen.

The trouble which blew up unexpectedly one evening was really of Idris' own finding. Hwyl had finished his meal, and was peacefully enjoying the last of the day beside his door, when Idris happened along, leading his whippet on a string.

"Oh, hullo you, Idris," Hwyl greeted him, amiably.

"Hullo you, Hwyl," said Idris. "And how is that phoney dragon of yours, now then?"

"Phoney, is it, you are saying?" repeated Hwyl, indignantly.

"Wings a dragon is wanting, to be a dragon," Idris insisted firmly.

"Wings to hell, man! Come you and look at him now then, and please to tell me what he is if he is no dragon."

He waved Idris into the house, and led him through into the yard. The dragon, reclining in its wired run, opened an eye at them, and closed it again. Idris had not seen it since it was lately out of the egg. Its growth impressed him.

"There is big he is now," he conceded. "Fine, the colours of him, and fancy, too. But no wings to him, so a dragon he is not."

"What, then, is it he is?" demanded Hwyl.

How Idris would have replied to this difficult question was never to be known, for at that moment the whippet jerked its string free from his fingers, and dashed, barking, at the wire-netting. The dragon was startled out of its snooze. It sat up suddenly, and snorted with surprise. There was a yelp from the whippet which bounded into the air, and then set off round and round the yard, howling. At last, Idris managed to corner it, and pick it up. All down the right side its hair had been scorched off, making it look very peculiar. Idris' eyebrows lowered.

"Trouble you want, is it? And trouble you will be having, by God!" he said.

He put the whippet down again, and began to take off his coat.

It was not clear whether he had addressed, and meant to fight, Hwyl or the dragon, but either intention was forestalled by Mrs. Hughes coming to investigate the yelping.

"Oh! Teasing the dragon, is it!" she said. "There is shameful, indeed. A lamb the dragon is, as people know well. But not to tease. It is wicked you are, Idris Bowen, and to fight does not make right, either. Go you from here, now then."

Idris began to protest, but Bronwen shook her head and set her mouth. "Not listening to you, I am, see. A fine brave man, to tease a helpless dragon. Not for weeks now has the dragon huffed. So go you, and quick."

Idris glowered. He hesitated, and pulled on his jacket again. He collected his whippet, and held it in his arms. After a final disparaging glance at the dragon, he turned.

"Law I will have of you," he announced ominously, as he left.

Nothing more, however, was heard of legal action. It seemed as if Idris had either changed his mind or been advised against it, and that the whole thing would blow over.

A few mornings later the Hughes were awakened by a hammering on their door. Hwyl went to the window and found Idris below. He asked what the matter was.

"Come you down here, and I will show you," Idris told him.

After some argument, Hwyl descended. Idris led the way round to the back of his own house, and pointed.

"Look you there, now," he said.

The door of Idris' hen-house was hanging by one hinge. The remains of two chickens lay close by. A large quantity of feathers was blowing about the yard.

Hwyl looked at the hen-house more closely. Several deep-raked scores stood out white on the creosoted wood. In other places there were darker smears where the wood seemed to have been scorched. Silently Idris pointed to the ground. There were marks of sharp claws, but no imprint of a whole foot.

"There is bad. Foxes is it?" inquired Hwyl.

Idris choked slightly.

"Foxes, you are saying. Foxes, indeed! What will it be but your dragon? And the police to know it, too."

Hwyl shook his head.

"No," he said.

"Oh," said Idris. "A liar, I am, is it? I will have the guts from you, Hwyl Hughes, smoking hot, too, and glad to do it."

"You talk too easy, man," Hwyl told him. "Only that the dragon is still fast in his hutch, I am saying. Come you now, and see."

They went back to Hwyl's house. The dragon was in his hutch, sure enough, and the door of it was fastened with a peg. Furthermore, as Hwyl pointed out, even if he had left it during the night, he could not have reached Idris' yard without leaving scratches and traces on the way, and there were none to be found.

They finally parted in a state of armistice. Idris was by no means convinced, but he was unable to get round the fact, and not at all impressed with Hwyl's suggestion that a practical joker could have produced the effect on the hen-house with a strong nail and a blowlamp.

Hwyl went upstairs again to finish dressing.

"There is funny it is, all the same," he observed to Bronwen. "No eyes that Idris has, for scorched the peg is, on the *outside* of the hutch. And how should that be, I wonder?"

"Huffed four times in the night the dragon has, five perhaps," Bronwen said. "Growling, he is, too, and banging that old hutch about. Never have I heard him like that before."

"There is queer," Hwyl said, frowning. "But never out of his hutch, and that to swear to."

Two nights later Hwyl was awakened by Bronwen shaking his shoulder.

"Listen, now then," she told him.

There was an unmistakable growling going on at the back of the house, and the sound of several snorts.

"Huffing, he is, see," said Bronwen, unnecessarily.

There was a crash of something thrown with force, and the

sound of a neighbour's voice cursing. Hwyl reluctantly decided that he had better get up and investigate.

Everything in the yard looked as usual, except for the presence of a large tin can which was clearly the object thrown. There was, however, a strong smell of burning and a thudding noise, recognizable as the sound of the dragon tramping round and round in his hutch to stamp out the bedding caught alight again. Hwyl went across and opened the door. He raked out the smouldering straw, fetched some fresh and threw it in.

"Quiet, you," he told the dragon. "More of this, and the hide I will have off you, slow and painful, too. Bed, now then, and sleep." He went back to bed himself, but it seemed as if he had only just laid his head on the pillow when it was daylight, and there was Idris Bowen hammering on the front door again.

Idris was more than a little incoherent, but Hwyl gathered that something further had taken place at his house, so he slipped on jacket and trousers, and went down. Idris led the way down beside his own house, and threw open the yard door with the air of a conjurer. Hwyl stared for some moments without speaking.

In front of Idris' hen-house stood a kind of trap, roughly contrived of angle-iron and wire-netting. In it, surrounded by chicken feathers, and glaring at them from eyes like live topazes, sat a creature, blood-red all over.

"Now, there is a dragon for you, indeed," Idris said. "Not to have colours like you see on a merry-go-round at a circus, either. A serious dragon, that one, and proper—wings, too, see?"

Hwyl went on looking at the dragon without a word. The wings were folded at present, and the cage did not give room to stretch them. The red, he saw now, was darker on the back, and brighter beneath, giving it the rather ominous effect of being lit from below by a blast-furnace. It certainly had a more practical aspect than his own dragon, and a fiercer look about it altogether. He stepped forward to examine it more closely.

"Careful, man," Idris warned him, laying a hand on his arm. The dragon curled back its lips, and snorted. Twin flames a yard long shot out of its nostrils. It was a far better huff than the other dragon had ever achieved. The air was filled with a strong smell of burnt feathers.

"A fine dragon, that is," Idris said again. "A real Welsh dragon for you. Angry he is, see, and no wonder. A shocking thing for a Chinese imperialist dragon to be in his country. Come to throw him out, he has, and mincemeat he will be making of your namby-pamby, best-parlour dragon, too!"

"Better for him not to try," said Hwyl, stouter in word than heart.

"And another thing, too. Red this dragon is, and so a real people's dragon, see."

"Now then. Now then. Propaganda with dragons again, is it? Red the Welsh dragon has been two thousand years, and a fighter, too, I grant you. But a fighter for Wales, look: not just a loud-mouth talker of fighting for peace, see. If it is a good Welsh dragon he is, then out of some kind of egg laid by your Uncle Joe, he is *not ;* and thankful, too, I think," Hwyl told him. "And look you," he added as an afterthought, "this one it is who is stealing your chickens, not mine, at all."

"Oh, let him have the old chickens, and glad," Idris said. "Here he is come to chase a foreign imperialist dragon out of his rightful territory, and a proper thing it is, too. None of your D.P. dragons are we wanting round Llynllawn."

"Get you to hell, man," Hwyl told him. "Sweet dispositioned my dragon is, no bother to anyone, and no robber of hen-houses, either. If there is trouble at all, the law I will be having of you and your dragon for disturbing of the peace, see. So I am telling you. And good-bye, now." He exchanged another glance with the angry-looking, topaz eyes of the red dragon, and then stalked away, back to his own house.

That evening, just as Hwyl was sitting down to his meal, there was a knock at the front door. Bronwen went to answer it, and came back.

"Ivor Thomas and Dafydd Ellis wanting you. Something about the Union," she told him.

He went to see them. They had a long and involved story about dues that seemed not to have been fully paid. Hwyl was certain that he was paid up to date, but they remained unconvinced. The argument went on for some time before, with head-shaking and reluctance, they consented to leave. Hwyl returned to the kitchen. Bronwen was waiting, standing by the table.

"Taken the dragon off, they have," she said flatly.

Hwyl stared at her. The reason why he had been kept at the front door in pointless argument suddenly came to him. He crossed to the window, and looked out. The back fence had been pushed flat, and a crowd of men carrying the dragon's hutch on their shoulders was already a hundred yards beyond it. Turning round, he saw Bronwen standing resolutely against the back door.

"Stealing, it is, and you not calling," he said accusingly.

"Knocked you down, they would, and got the dragon just the same," she said. "Idris Bowen and his lot, it is."

Hwyl looked out of the window again.

"What to do with him, now then?" he asked.

"Dragon fight, it is," she told him. "Betting, they were. Five to one on the Welsh dragon, and sounding very sure, too."

Hwyl shook his head.

"Not to wonder, either. There is not fair, at all. Wings, that Welsh dragon has, so air attacks he can make. Unsporting, there is, and shameful indeed."

He looked out of the window again. More men were joining the party as it marched its burden across the waste-ground, towards the slag-heap. He sighed. "There is sorry I am for our dragon. Murder it will be, I think. But go and see it, I will. So no tricks from that Idris to make a dirty fight dirtier."

Bronwen hesitated.

"No fighting for you? You promise me?" she said.

"Is it a fool I am, girl, to be fighting fifty men and more? Please to grant me some brains, now."

She moved doubtfully out of his way, and let him open the door. Then she snatched up a scarf, and ran after him, tying it over her head as she went.

The crowd that was gathering on a piece of flat ground near the foot of the slag-heap already consisted of something more like a hundred men than fifty, and there were more hurrying to join it. Several self-constituted stewards were herding people back to clear an oval space. At one end of it was the cage in which the red dragon crouched huddled, with a bad-tempered look. At the other, the asbestos hutch was set down, and its bearers withdrew. Idris noticed Hwyl and Bronwen as they came up.

"And how much is it you are putting on your dragon?" he inquired, with a grin.

Bronwen said, before Hwyl could reply: "Wicked, it is, and shamed you should be, Idris Bowen. Clip you your dragon's wings to fight fair, and we will see. But betting against a horse-shoe in the glove, we are not." And she dragged Hwyl away.

All about the oval the laying of bets went on, with the Welsh dragon gaining favour all the time. Presently, Idris stepped out into the open and held up his hands for quiet.

"Sport it is for you tonight. Super-colossal attraction, as they are saying on the movies, and never again, likely. So put you your money, now. When the English law is hearing of this, no more dragon-fighting, it will be—like no more to cock-fight."

A boo went up, mingled with the laughter of those who knew a thing or two about cock-fighting that the English law did not. Idris went on: "So now the dragon championship, I am giving you. On my right, the Red Dragon of Wales, on his home ground. A people's dragon, see. For more than a coincidence, it is, that the colour of the Welsh dragon—"

His voice was lost for some moments in controversial shouts. It re-emerged, saying, "—on the left, the decadent dragon of the imperialist exploiters of the suffering Chinese people who, in their glorious fight for peace under the heroic leadership—" But the rest of his introduction was also lost among the catcalls and cheers that were still continuing when he beckoned forward attendants from the ends of the oval, and withdrew.

At one end, two men reached up with a hooked pole, pulled over the contraption that enclosed the red dragon, and ran back hurriedly. At the far end, a man knocked the peg from the asbestos door, pulled it open, scuttled round behind the hutch, and no less speedily out of harm's way.

The red dragon looked round, uncertainly. It tentatively tried unfurling its wings. Finding that possible, it reared up on its hind legs, supporting itself on its tail, and flapped them energetically, as though to dispel the creases.

The other dragon ambled out of its hutch, advanced a few feet, and stood blinking. Against the background of the waste-ground and the slag-heap it looked more than usually exotic. It yawned largely with a fine display of fangs, rolled its eyes hither and thither, and then caught sight of the red dragon.

Simultaneously, the red dragon noticed the other. It stopped flapping, and dropped to all four feet. The two regarded one another. A hush came over the crowd. Both dragons remained motionless, except for a slight waving of the last or so of their tails.

The oriental dragon turned its head a little on one side. It snorted slightly, and shrivelled up a patch of weeds.

The red dragon stiffened. It suddenly adopted a pose gardant, one forefoot uplifted with claws extended, wings raised. It huffed with vigour, vaporized a puddle, and disappeared momentarily in a cloud of steam. There was an anticipatory murmur from the crowd.

The red dragon began to pace round, circling the other, giving a slight flap of its wings now and then.

The crowd watched it intently. So did the other dragon. It did not move from its position, but turned as the red dragon circled, keeping its head and gaze steadily towards it.

With the circle almost completed, the red dragon halted. It extended its wings widely, and gave a full-throated roar. Simultaneously, it gushed two streams of fire, and belched a small cloud of black smoke. The part of the crowd nearest to it moved back apprehensively.

At this tense moment Bronwen Hughes began suddenly to laugh. Hwyl shook her by the arm.

"Hush, you! There is not funny, at all," he said, but she did not stop at once.

The oriental dragon did nothing for a moment. It appeared to be thinking the matter over. Then it turned swiftly round, and began to run. The crowd behind it raised a jeer, those in front waved their arms to shoo it back. But the dragon was unimpressed by arm-waving. It came on, with now and then a short spurt of flame from its nostrils. The people wavered and then scattered out of its way. Half a dozen men started to chase after it with sticks, but soon gave up. It was travelling at twice the pace they could run.

With a roar, the red dragon leapt into the air, and came across the field, spitting flames like a strafing aircraft. The crowd scattered still more swiftly, tumbling over itself as it cleared a way. The running dragon disappeared round the foot of the slag-heap, with the other hovering above it. Shouts of disappointment rose from the crowd, and a good part of it started to follow, to be in at the death.

But in a minute or two the running dragon came into view again. It was making a fine pace up the mountainside, with the red dragon still flying a little behind it. Everybody stood watching it wind its way up and up until finally it disappeared over the shoulder. For a moment the flying dragon still showed as a black silhouette above the skyline, then, with a final whiff of flame, it, too, disappeared—and the arguments about paying up began.

Idris left the wrangling to come across to the Hughes.

"So there is a coward your imperialist dragon is, then. And not one good huff, or a bite to him, either," he said.

Bronwen looked at him, and smiled.

"So foolish, you are, Idris Bowen, with your head full of propaganda and fighting. Other things than to fight, there is, even for dragons.

"Such a brave show your red dragon was making, such a fine show, oh, yes—and very like a peacock, I am thinking. Very like the boys in their Sunday suits in Llangolwgcoch High Street, too—all dressed up to kill, but not to fight."

Idris stared at her.

"And our dragon," she went on. "Well, there is not a very new trick, either. Done a bit of it before now, I have, myself." She cast a sidelong glance at Hwyl.

Light began to dawn on Idris. "But—but it is *he* you were always calling your dragon," he protested.

Bronwen shrugged. "Oh, yes, indeed. But how to tell with dragons?" she asked.

She turned to look up the mountain.

"There is lonely, lonely the red dragon must have been these two thousand years—so, not much bothering with your politics he is, just now. More single with his mind, see. And interesting it will be, indeed, to be having a lot of baby dragons in Wales before long, I am thinking."

★ ★ ★

MICHAELMAS MIXTURE

Michaelmas Muffet, as the spider said, sat on a tuffet, making a daisy chain; when the spider dropped by she attempted to dunk it in the remains of her junket, and so the poor spider was slain—or would have been if he hadn't cleverly run up her sleeve. Moral: Look sharp, and if you want to be sharp, practise on our quiz. Solutions on page 143.

1. *Who says "J'adoube," and when?*
2. *Who are the identities concealed behind these pen-names: Agatha Christie; Bartimeus; Q; Dornford Yates; Saki?*
3. *What is a Penny fish?*
4. *How many Poets Laureate have therebeen? Who was the first?*
5. *What is the connection between Teddy Boys and Hawcubites?*
6. *When was the term Macadamized first used for road-metalling?*
7. *Can you identify the dying speakers of these words?*
   a. "I am absolutely undone."
   b. "Let not poor Nelly starve."
8. *Who is a Loblolly boy?*

QUIZ COMPETITION RESULTS

Argosy Quiz Competition: Readers came nobly up to scratch with erudite and witty questions, and old Uncle Horatio has been hard at work, inseparable from his encyclopedia, as he checked through the solutions. First prize of two guineas goes to Lieutenant Colonel R. K. Spurrell, Reigate, Surrey (whose entry will be printed next month) and second prize of half a guinea to David Gunston, Denmead, Hants. Honourable mention to Mrs. G. M. Crofts for her rhyming date-quiz—

*Puffing Billy in ——**
Made all passengers' faces dirty.

*1830

WEDDING DRESS

In the rustling of the lilacs
footsteps stole in

BY LOUIS BROMFIELD

ZENOBIA WHITE is dead! This morning as I came down to breakfast I saw through the tall window that overlooks the meadows the figure of Jabez Torrence, who lives on the river farm, coming up the lane from the highroad. He was running, and when he saw me he cried out in a loud voice, "Zenobia White is dead!"

And then he fell silent, embarrassed, speechless, as if he understood at once how silly it was to be excited over the death of a queer old maid who had lived long past her time—an old woman who had lived for almost a century.

"Zenobia White is dead!"

Something had gone out of our world, the world of Jabez and me and all the county. Who could say what it was?

She had been dead for three days, said Jabez. No one would have found her in her little house among the bushes if her dogs had not set up a mournful unbroken howling.

Jabez' father had walked in through the thicket surrounding her house. "Even the birds," said Jabez, "were still." He had walked through the chickens and dogs and cats up to the door, and knocked. But there was only silence, as there had been only silence on one lonely night more than seventy years before.

Inside, on her bed, Zenobia White lay dead. She was dressed in a wedding gown of white silk, with the veil of a bride covering her immensely old and wrinkled face. The stuff of the dress was so old that it had turned yellow.

So something had gone out of our world, and Jabez, in his bewilderment, knew it as well as I. We should never see Zenobia White again, walking down the highroad with the long train of her yellow taffeta dress trailing in the white dust, a basket over one arm, her lace mitts adjusted neatly, the plumes in her big hat waving in the breeze . . . Zenobia White walking down the white highroad, very tall and straight and proud for such an immensely old woman, her black eyes flashing proudly beneath

the little veil of black lace that hung from her queer bedraggled bonnet . . . Zenobia White, immensely fierce and old, dressed always in yellow taffeta like Sarah Bernhardt in the picture by Carolus-Duran . . . Zenobia White, followed by a whole procession of cats.

Far down the valley beyond the figure of Jabez I could see the little house surrounded by bushes. I could even see for a moment a glimpse of the old white horse which Zenobia had raised from a colt and which had never known harness or saddle. The old white horse which lived inside her garden and attacked any intruder with bared teeth and unshod hoofs. The old white horse which this morning had not attacked Jabez' father.

This morning, when Zenobia White lay dead in her wedding dress, he stood sadly, waiting. The garden was full of birds, orioles and wrens and cardinals and a great number of dogs—queer, yellow mongrel dogs, unwanted by anyone, which had come to live with old Zenobia.

Zenobia White, with a thousand stories clinging to her memory! The story of the night when robbers evaded the old white horse and tortured Zenobia by baking her feet in her own oven! But she had not told them where her money was. They had gone away when she fainted, defeated. And after that Zenobia's proud walk carried the hint of a limp . . .

But she belonged to my grandfather's day—a tall, handsome girl of twenty who sat a horse like an Amazon and was courted by half the men of the county. But even in those days she had lived alone in the cottage. The mother of Zenobia White had been an Indian woman, an Iroquois princess, who died soon after Zenobia was born. At twenty, she was an orphan.

Zenobia White at twenty, living alone in the days when prowlers and renegade Indians infested the county. But Zenobia, young and beautiful, had stayed in the little house by the river, alone, armed with her father's pistols.

"But Zenobia," my grandfather used to say, "could look out for herself." He knew, perhaps, because he was one of those who admired her.

But Zenobia loved, with all the fierceness in her black eyes, young McDougal, red-haired and fiery-tempered, the fastest runner in the county. She was to marry him. They went in the long summer evenings to ride the tangled trails of the wild countryside. And they quarrelled, for both had high tempers.

And one night, two days before they were to be married, my grandfather, returning from the mill, saw them come home. They had quarrelled, and Zenobia rode a little ahead of her lover,

flushed and angry and handsome. And when they reached the cottage she turned in alone, without a word . . . My grandfather says she was a beautiful woman.

And then, my grandfather said, Zenobia had gone into the house and, after bolting the doors and windows of the lonely house against intruders, sat down to read her Bible and pray that her fierce spirit might be subdued. She sat reading thus until long after midnight, in a tiny house set in a clearing pressed upon by the great trees of the forest. And presently, as Zenobia read, the sound of footsteps stole in upon her consciousness—faint and confused in the rustling of the lilacs—the sound of footsteps, the footsteps of one or perhaps of many men.

Zenobia put out the flame of the single mutton-tallow candle and sat listening, listening to the sounds in the garden, the sound of the owls and of the wind rising over the river. And slowly, when the sounds persisted, she took her father's pistol and, raising it, fired through the door to frighten the ghostly intruders. The sound of a shot and then a silence . . . while Zenobia stood there in the darkness with the smoking pistol in her hand, waiting—waiting!

There was only silence. They had gone away. Nothing but the sighing of the wind and the faint hooting of the owls . . .

And in the morning, my grandfather said, Zenobia was awakened by the brilliant spring sun streaming in at the window and by the happy clamour of the thrushes and cardinals in the garden. The sunlight fell upon the wedding dress that lay spread out over the chair at her side.

When she had dressed and gone downstairs—she was singing, she told my grandfather—she unbolted the doors and windows one by one until she came to the last which opened into the garden. And there, full in the path, face downward, his red hair flaming in the sunlight, lay Jock McDougal—dead—with a bullet through his heart.

I looked up and saw the figure of Jabez, sitting now under a tree in the lane, still puzzling.

We shall never again see Zenobia White with the procession of cats at her heels, her yellow taffeta trailing the white dust. Zenobia White is dead. She is being buried tomorrow in her wedding dress.

★ ★ ★

DROWNRIGHT

Perfectionist: The man who refuses to use a lifebelt because there's a hole in it.

WELCOME

A house without a cat, and a well-fed, well-petted, and properly revered cat, may be a perfect house, perhaps, but how can it prove its title?

MARK TWAIN, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Tabbies and blacks are aloof and superior
Tortoiseshells feminine, winsome, and coy
White, unless washed, won't adorn your interior
Siamese voices all friendship destroy—

Greys are deceitful, remote, disingenuous
Owners of Persians are slaves to the comb
Manx are ungraceful and Maltese too strenuous
Marmalade cats are the cats for the home.

NICHOLAS DEE

Food For Thought

"My cats lead such sheltered lives: they have taken an involuntary oath of chastity. I think cats are magnificent animals, Harry. Do you ever notice how they fold themselves up and stare into space with incredibly philosophic expressions on their faces. Imagine three of them doing it at once. They *know* something: I am positive that an enormous truth lies behind the eyes of every cat. I often wonder what it could be."

"Don't be ridiculous, Tulley," I laughed. "All they've got behind their eyes is a mass of soft pink pulp. That's what I like about Kitty—she's all real and palpable, and she doesn't pretend to be anything more."

"How crude!" He shuddered. "Soft pink pulp. There is more than that, Harry. Just look at her now. Do you mean to tell me there is not a thought in her head?"

"Well, if there is, it's all about food."

ALFRED CHESTER, *Jamie is my Heart's Desire*

ON THE MAT

Love Me, Love My Mog

He had a special vocabulary for defining the various grades of feline excellence, beginning with "pussum" and culminating in MOG—the supreme cat, the Platonic cat, the cat in the mind of God, the Great One of the Night Time.

CECIL GRAY,
Peter Warlock

Entrechats

They park by the door,
Idling, sunning,
With headlights shining
And motors running.

ETHEL JACOBSON,
Two Cats on a Doormat

Cat-as-Trophy

Laws regarding cats were most strict, and the killing of one was punishable by death, banishment, or life imprisonment. That these laws were known throughout the world is proved by the story of the Persian King, Cambyses, who attacked the town of Peluse by the tactical device of making the vanguard of his army approach the town with each soldier carrying a cat in front of him. So terrified were the Egyptian garrison of the penalty they would receive if they killed one of the cats, that although the town was well fortified they allowed the Persians to occupy it without resistance.

Kit Wilson's
Cat Encyclopedia

Sans Souci

Ah! Killikrates didn't care. He went on purring, and drinking milk, and begging for toast. And when he wanted you he put an enormous paw, lined with orange velvet, upon your knee. And when he didn't want you he just walked away, leaving behind him a trail of contempt.

Oh! fortunate cat, aloof from all passions and all responsibilities, centre of his visible world, on whom no emotions are enjoined, and that dwells on an Olympus below the crest of which loves and duties hang pale as clouds.

W. L. GEORGE,
Blind Alley

Felicity

As I mused by the hearthside,
Puss said to me:
" There burns the Fire, man,
And here sit we.

" Four walls around us
Against the cold air;
And the latchet drawn close
To the draughty Stair.

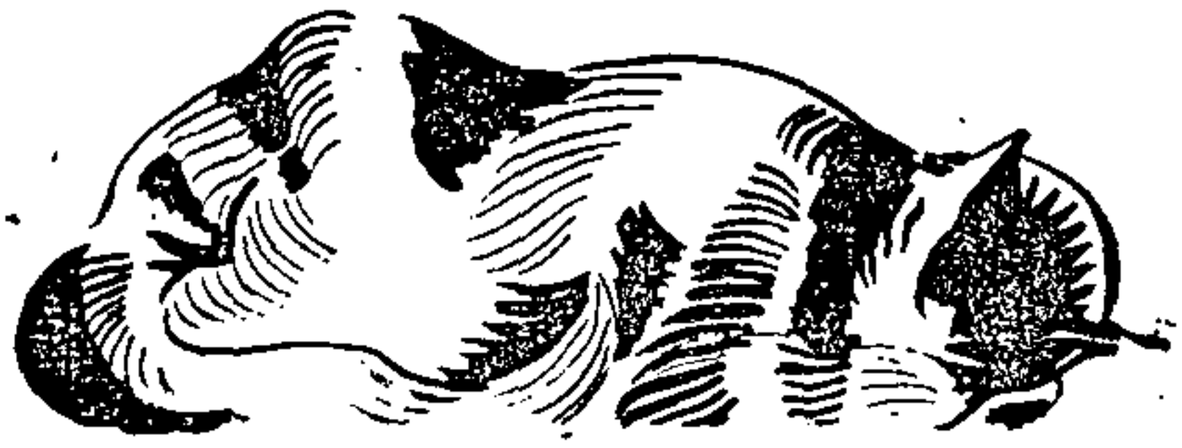
" A Roof o'er our heads
Star-proof, moon immune,
And a wind in the chimney
To wail us a tune.

" What Felicity! " miaowed he,
" Where none may intrude;
Just Man and Beast—met
In this solitude!

" Dear God, what security,
Comfort and bliss!
And to think, too, what ages
Have brought us to this!

" You in your sheep's-wool coat,
Buttons of bone,
And me in my fur-about
On the warm hearthstone."

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Comfort*



FURRY NIGHT

The two pairs of golden eyes
met and acknowledged each other

BY JOAN AIKEN

THE deserted aisles of the National Museum of Dramatic Art lay very, very still in the blue autumn twilight. Not a whisper of wind stirred the folds of Irving's purple cloak; Ellen Terry's ostrich fan was smooth and unruffled; the blue-black gleaming breastplate that Sir Murdoch Meredith, founder of the Museum, had worn as Macbeth, held its reflections as quietly as a cottage kettle.

And yet, despite this hush, there was an air of strain, of expectancy, along the narrow, coconut-matted galleries between the glass cases; a tension suggesting that some crisis had taken or was about to take place.

In the total stillness a listener might have imagined that he heard, ever so faintly, the patter of stealthy feet far away among the exhibits.

Two men, standing in the shadow of the Garrick showcase, were talking in low voices.

" This is where it happened," said the elder, white-haired man.

He picked up a splinter of broken glass, frowned at it, and dropped it into a litter bin. The glass had been removed from the front of the case, and some black tights and gilt medals hung exposed to the evening air.

" We managed to hush it up. The hospital and ambulance men will be discreet, of course. Nobody else was there, luckily. Only the Bishop was worried."

" I should think so," the younger man said. " It's enough to make anybody anxious."

" No, I mean he was *worried*. Hush," the white-haired man whispered. " Here comes Sir Murdoch."

The distant susurration had intensified into soft, pacing footsteps. The two men, without a word, stepped farther back in the shadow until they were out of sight. A figure appeared at the end of the aisle and moved forward until it stood beneath the portrait of Edmund Kean as Shylock. The picture, in its deep frame, was nothing but a square of dark against the wall.

Although they were expecting it, both men jumped when the haunted voice began to speak.

You may as well use question with the wolf
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb—

A sleeve of one of the watchers brushed against the wall, the lightest possible touch, but Sir Murdoch swung round sharply, his head out-thrust, teeth bared. They held their breath, and after a moment he turned back to the picture.

Thy currish spirit
Governed a wolf, who, hang'd for human slaughter,
Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet . . .

He paused, with a hand pressed to his forehead, and then leaned forward and hissed,

Thy desires
Are wolvish, bloody, starv'd, and ravenous!

His head sank on his chest. His voice ceased. He brooded for a moment, and then resumed his pacing and soon passed out of sight. They heard the steps go lightly down the stairs, and presently the whine of the revolving door.

After a prudent interval the two others emerged from their hiding-place, left the gallery, and went out to a car which was waiting for them in Great Smith Street.

"I wanted you to see that, Peachtree," said the elder man, "to give you some idea of what you are taking on. Candidly, as far as experience goes, I hardly feel you are qualified for the job, but you are young and tough, and have presence of mind; most important of all, Sir Murdoch seems to have taken a fancy to you. You will have to keep an unobtrusive eye on him every minute of the day; your job is a combination of secretary, companion, and resident psychiatrist. I have written to Dr. Defoe, the local G.P. at Polgrue. He is old, but you will find him full of practical sense. Take his advice . . . I think you said you were brought up in Australia?"

"Yes," Ian Peachtree said. "I only came to this country six months ago."

"Ah, so you missed seeing Sir Murdoch act."

"Was he so very wonderful?"

"He made the comedies too macabre," said Lord Hawick, considering. "But in the tragedies there was no one to touch him. His Macbeth was something to make you shudder. When he said,

Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost—

he used to take two or three stealthy steps across the stage, and you could literally see the grey fur rise on his hackles, the lips drawn back from the fangs, the yellow eyes begin to gleam. It made a cold chill run down your spine. As Shylock and Cæsar and Timon he was unrivalled. Othello and Antony he never touched, but his Iago was a masterpiece of villainy."

"Why did he give it up? He can't be much over fifty."

"As with other sufferers from lycanthropy," said Lord Hawick, "Sir Murdoch has an ungovernable temper. Whenever he flew into a rage it brought on an attack. They grew more and more frequent. A clumsy stage-hand, a missed cue, might set him off; he'd begin to shake with rage and the terrifying change would take place.

"On stage it wasn't so bad; he had his audiences completely hypnotised and they easily accepted a grey-furred Iago padding across the stage with the handkerchief in his mouth. But off stage it was less easy; the claims for mauling and worrying were beginning to mount up; Equity objected. So he retired and, for some time, founding the Museum absorbed him. But now it's finished, his temper is becoming uncertain again. This afternoon, as you know, he pounced on the Bishop for innocently remarking that Garrick's Hamlet was the world's greatest piece of acting."

"How do you treat the attacks?"

"Wolf's-bane. Two or three drops given in a powerful sedative will restore him for the time. Of course, administering it is the problem, as you can imagine. I only hope the surroundings in Cornwall will be sufficiently peaceful so that he is not provoked. It's a pity he never married; a woman's influence would be beneficial."

"Why didn't he?"

"Jilted when he was thirty. Never looked at another woman. Some girl down at Polgrue, near his home. It was the devil of a jilt; she wrote two days before the wedding saying she couldn't stand his temper. That began it all. This will be the first time he's been back there. Well, here we are," said Lord Hawick, glancing out at his Harley Street doorstep. "Come in and I'll give you the wolf's-bane prescription."

The eminent specialist courteously held the door for his young colleague.

The journey was uneventful. Dr. Peachtree drove his distinguished patient down to Cornwall, glancing at him from time to time with mingled awe and affection. Would the harassing crawl down the Great West Road, the jam in Exeter, the puncture on

Dartmoor, bring on an attack? Would he be able to cope if they did? But the handsome profile remained unchanged, the golden eyes in their deep sockets stayed the eyes of a man, not those of a wolf, and Sir Murdoch talked entertainingly, not at all discomposed by the delays. Ian was fascinated by his tales of the theatre.

There was only one anxious moment, when they reached the borders of Polgrue Chase. Sir Murdoch glanced angrily at his neglected coverts, where the brambles grew long and wild.

"Wait till I see that agent," he muttered, and then, half to himself, "O, thou wilt be a wilderness again, Peopled with wolves."

Ian devoutly hoped that the agent would have a good excuse.

But the Hall, hideous Victorian-Gothic barrack though it was, they found gay with lights and warm with welcome. The old housekeeper wept over Sir Murdoch, bottles were uncorked, the table shone with ancestral silver. Ian began to feel less apprehensive.

After dinner they moved outside with their nuts and wine and sat in the light that streamed from the dining-room french windows on to the terrace. A great walnut tree hung shadowy above them; its golden, aromatic leaves littered the flagstones at their feet.

"This place has a healing air," Sir Murdoch said. "I should have come here sooner." Suddenly he stiffened. "Hudson! Who are those?"

Far across the park, almost out of sight in the dusk, figures were flitting among the trees.

"Eh," said the housekeeper comfortably, "they're none but the lads, Sir Murdoch, practising for the Furry Race. Don't you worrit about 'em. They won't do no harm."

"On my land?" Sir Murdoch said. "Running across my land?"

Ian saw with a sinking heart that his eyes were turning to gleaming yellow slits, his hands were stiffening and curling. Would the housekeeper mind? Did she know her master was subject to these attacks? He felt in his pocket for the little ampoules of wolf's-bane, the hypodermic syringe.

There came an interruption. A girl's clear voice was heard singing:

Now the hungry lion roars,
And the wolf behowls the moon—

"It's Miss Clarissa," said the housekeeper with relief.

A slender figure swung round the corner of the terrace and came towards them.

"Sir Murdoch? How do you do? I'm Clarissa Defoe. My father sent me up to pay his respects. He would have come himself, but he was called out on a case. Isn't it a gorgeous night?"

Sitting down beside them she chatted amusingly and easily, while Ian observed with astonished delight that his employer's hands were unclenching and his eyes were becoming their normal shape again. If this girl was able to soothe Sir Murdoch without recourse to wolf's-bane they must see a lot of her.

But when Sir Murdoch remarked that the evening was becoming chilly and proposed that they go indoors, Ian's embryonic plan received a jolt.

He was a tough and friendly young man who had never taken a great deal of interest in girls; the first sight, in lamplight, of Clarissa Defoe's wild beauty came on him with a shattering impact. Could he throw this loveliness, quite literally, to the wolf? He did not think he could.

More and more enslaved, he sat gazing as Clarissa played and sang Ariel's songs. Sir Murdoch, too, seemed utterly enthralled and relaxed. When Clarissa left, Ian persuaded him to bed without the topic of the Furry Race coming up again.

Next morning, however, when he went down to the village for a consultation with cheerful, shrewd-eyed old Dr. Defoe, he asked about it.

"Heh," said the Doctor, "the Furry Race? My daughter revived it five years ago. There's two villages, ye see, Polgrue and Lostmaidenhead (pronounce it Lostmid), and there's this ball, what they call the Furry Ball. It's not furry; it's made of applewood with a silver band round the middle, and on the band is written,

Fro Lostmid Parish iffe I goe
Heddes will be broke and bloode will flowe.

"The ball is kept in Lostmid, and on the day of the race one of the Polgrue lads has to sneak in and take it and get it over the parish boundary before anybody stops him. Nobody's succeeded in doing it yet. But why do you ask?"

Ian explained about the scene the night before.

"Eh, I see; that's awkward. You're afraid it may bring on an attack if he sees 'em crossing his land? Trouble is, that's the quickest short cut over the parish boundary."

"If your daughter withdrew her support, would the race be abandoned?"

"My dear feller, she'd never do that. She's mad about it. She's a bit wild, Clarissa, and the rough-housing amuses her—always is plenty of horse-play even though they don't get the

ball over the boundary. If her mother were still alive now . . . Bless my soul!" the old doctor burst out, looking troubled, "I wish Meredith had never come back to these parts, that I do. You can speak with Clarissa about it, but I doubt you'll not persuade her. She's out looking over the course now."

The two villages of Lostmid and Polgrue lay in deep, adjacent glens, and Polgrue Chase ended on the stretch of high moor that ran between them. There was a crossroads and a telephone box, used by both villages. A spinney of wind-bitten beeches stood in one angle of the cross, and Clarissa was thoughtfully surveying this terrain. Ian joined her, turning to look back towards the Hall and noticing with relief that Sir Murdoch was still, as he had been left, placidly knocking a ball round his private golf-course.

It was a stormy, shining day. Ian saw that Clarissa's hair was exactly the colour of the sea-browned beechleaves, and that the strange, enchanting angles of her face were emphasised by the wild shafts of sunlight glancing through the trees.

He put his difficulties to her.

"Oh dear," she said wrinkling her brow. "How unfortunate. The boys are so keen on the race. I don't think they'd ever give it up."

"Couldn't they go some other way?"

"But this is the only possible way, don't you see? In the old days, of course, this all used to be common land."

"Do you know who the runner is going to be—the boy with the ball?" Ian asked, wondering if a sufficiently heavy bribe would persuade him to take a longer way round.

But Clarissa smiled with innocent topaz eyes, "My dear, that's never decided until the very *last* minute. So that the Lostmidians don't know who's going to dash in and seize the ball. But I'll tell you what we *can* do—we can arrange for the race to take place at night, so that Sir Murdoch won't be worried by the spectacle. Yes, that's an excellent idea; it will make it far more exciting. It's next Thursday, you know."

Ian was not at all sure that he approved of this idea, but just then he noticed Sir Murdoch having difficulties in a bunker. A good deal of sand was flying about and his employer's face was becoming a dangerous, dusky red. "Here, in the sands, Thee I'll rake up," he was muttering angrily, and something about murderous lechers.

Ian ran down to him and suggested that it was time for a glass of beer, waving to Clarissa as he did so. Sir Murdoch saw her and was instantly mollified. He invited her to join them.

Ian, by now head-over-heels in love, was torn between professional duty, which could not help pointing out to him how

beneficial Clarissa's company was for his patient, and a strong personal feeling that the elderly wolfish baronet was not at all good company for Clarissa. Worse, he suspected that she guessed his plight and was laughing at it. Why else was he given those tawny gleams from the corners of her eyes as she solemnly discussed wild flowers with Sir Murdoch?

The week passed peacefully enough. Sir Murdoch summoned the chairmen of the two parish councils and told them that any trespass over his land on the day of the Furry Race would be punished with the utmost rigour. They listened with blank faces. He also ordered mantraps and spring-guns from the Dominion and Colonial Stores, but to Ian's relief it seemed unlikely they would arrive in time.

Clarissa dropped in frequently. Her playing and singing seemed to have as soothing an effect on Sir Murdoch as the songs of the harpist, David, on touchy old Saul, but Ian had the persistent feeling that some peril threatened from her presence.

On Furry Day she did not appear. Sir Murdoch spent most of the day pacing—loping was really the word for it, Ian thought—distrustfully among his far spinneys, but no trespasser moved in the bracken and dying leaves. Towards evening a fidgety, scuffling wind sprang up, and Ian persuaded his employer indoors.

"No one will come, Sir Murdoch. Your notices have scared them off. They'll have gone another way." He wished he felt sure of it. He found a performance of *Cæsar and Cleopatra* on TV and switched it on, but Shaw seemed to make Sir Murdoch impatient. Presently he got up, began to pace about, and turned it off, muttering,

And why should Cæsar be a tyrant, then?
Poor man! I know he would not be a wolf.

He swung round on Ian. "Did I do wrong to shut them off my land?"

"Well," Ian was temporising when there came an outburst of explosions from Lostmid, hidden in the valley, and a dozen rockets soared into the sky beyond the windows.

"That means someone's taken the Furry Ball," said Hudson, coming in with the decanter of sherry. "Been long enough about it, seemingly."

Sir Murdoch's expression changed completely. One stride took him to the french window. He opened it, and went streaking across the park. Ian bolted after him.

"Stop! Sir Murdoch, stop!"

Sir Murdoch turned an almost unrecognizable face and hissed,

"Wake not a sleeping wolf!" He kept on his way, with Ian stubbornly in pursuit. They came out by the cross-roads and, looking down on Lostmid, saw that it was a circus of wandering lights, clustering, darting this way and that.

"They've lost him!" Ian muttered. "No, there he goes!" One of the lights broke off at a tangent and moved away down the valley, then turned and came straight for them diagonally across the hillside.

"I'll have to go and warn him off," Ian thought, "can't let him run straight into trouble." He ran downhill towards the approaching light. Sir Murdoch stole back into the shade of the spinney. Nothing of him was visible but two golden, glowing eye-points.

It was at this moment that Clarissa, having established her red-herring diversion by sending a boy with a torch across the hillside, ran swiftly and silently up the steep road towards the signpost. She wore trousers and a dark sweater, and was clutching the Furry Ball in her hand.

Sir Murdoch heard the pit-pat of approaching footsteps, waited for his moment, and sprang.

It was the thick, fisherman's-knit jersey with its roll collar that saved her. They rolled over and over, girl and wolf entangled, and then she caught him a blow on the jaw with the heavy applewood ball, dropped it, scrambled free, and was away. She did not dare look back. She had a remarkable turn of speed, but the wolf was overtaking her. She hurled herself into the telephone box and let the door clang behind her.

The wolf arrived a second later; she heard the impact as the grey, sinewy body struck the door, saw the gleam of teeth through the glass. Methodically, though with shaking hands, she turned to dial.

Meanwhile Ian had met the red-herring boy just as his triumphant pursuers caught up with him.

"You mustn't go that way," Ian gasped, "Sir Murdoch's waiting up there, and he's out for blood."

"Give over that thurr ball," yelled the Lostmidians.

"'Tisn't on me!" the boy yelled back, regardless of the fact that he was being pulled limb from limb. "Caught ye properly, me fine fules. 'Tis Miss Clarissa's got it, and she'm gone backaway."

"*What?*"

Ian waited for no more. He left them to their battle, in which some Polgrue reinforcements were now joining, and bounded back up the murderous ascent to where he had left Sir Murdoch.

The scene at the telephone box was brilliantly lit by the

overhead light. Clarissa had finished her call, and was watching with detached interest as the infuriated wolf threw himself repeatedly against the door.

It is not easy to address your employer in such circumstances. Ian chose a low, controlled but vibrant tone.

"Down, Sir Murdoch!" he said. "Down, sir! Heel!"

Sir Murdoch turned on him a look of golden, thunderous wrath. He was really a fine spectacle, with his eyes flashing and great ruff raised in rage. He must have weighed all of a hundred and thirty pounds. Ian thought he might be a timber-wolf but was not sure. He pulled the ampoule from his pocket, charged the syringe, and made a cautious approach. Instantly Sir Murdoch flew at him. With a feint like a bullfighter's, Ian dodged round the call-box.

"Olé," Clarissa shouted approvingly, opening the door a crack. Sir Murdoch instantly turned and battered it again.

"Avaunt, thou damned door-keeper!" shouted Ian. The result was electrifying. The wolf dropped to the ground as if stunned. Ian seized advantage of the moment to give him his injection, and immediately the wolf-shape vanished, dropping off Sir Murdoch like a label off a wet bottle. He gasped, shivered, and shut his eyes.

"Where am I?" he said presently, opening them again. Ian took his arm, gently led him away from the door, and made him sit on a grassy bank.

"You'll feel better in a minute or two, sir," he said, and, since Shakespeare seemed to be so efficacious, added, "The cure whereof, my lord, 'Tis time must do." Sir Murdoch weakly nodded.

Clarissa came out of her refuge. "Are you all right now, Sir Murdoch?" she asked kindly. "Shall I sing you a song?"

"All right, thank you, my dear," he murmured. "What are you doing here?" and he added to himself, "I really must not fly into these rages. I feel quite dizzy."

Ian stepped aside and picked up something that glinted on the ground.

"What's that?" asked Sir Murdoch with awakening interest. "May I see it?"

"Oh, it's my medallion," said Clarissa at the same moment. "It must have come off . . ." Her voice trailed away. They both watched Sir Murdoch. Deep, fearful shudders were running through him.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded, turning his cavernous eyes on Clarissa. His fingers were rigid, clenched on the tiny silver St. Francis.

"It was my mother's," she said faintly. For the first time she seemed frightened.

"Was her name Louisa?" She nodded. "Then your father—?"

"Here comes my father now," said Clarissa with relief. The gnarled figure of the doctor was approaching them through the spinney. Sir Murdoch turned on him like a javelin.

"O thou foul thief!" he hissed. "My lost Louisa, stol'n from me and corrupted by spells and medicines."

"Oh, come, come, come," said the doctor equably, never slowing his approach, though he kept a wary eye on Sir Murdoch. "I wouldn't put it quite like that. She came to me. *I* was looking forward to bachelorhood."

"For the which I may go the finer, I will live a bachelor," murmured Ian calmingly.

"And I'll tell ye this, Sir Murdoch," Dr. Defoe went on, tucking his arm through that of Sir Murdoch like an old friend, "You were well rid of her." He started strolling at a gentle but purposeful pace back towards the Hall, and the baronet went with him doubtfully.

"Why is that?" Already Sir Murdoch sounded convinced, quiescent.

"Firstly, my dear sir, Temper. Out of this world! Secondly, Macaroni Cheese. Every night till one begged for mercy. Thirdly, Unpunctuality. Fourthly, long, horrifying Dreams, which she insisted on telling at breakfast . . ."

Pursuing this soothing, therapeutic vein, the doctor's voice moved farther away, and the two men were lost in the shadows.

"So that's all right," said Clarissa on a deep breath of relief. "Why, Ian!"

Pent-up relief was too much for him. He had grabbed her in his arms like a drowning man. "I was sick with fright for you," he muttered, into her hair, her ear, the back of her neck. "I was afraid—oh, well, never mind."

"Never mind," she agreed. "Are we going to get married?"

"Of course."

"I ought to find my Furry Ball," she said presently. "They seem to be having a pitched battle down below; there's a good chance of getting it over the boundary while everyone's busy."

"But Sir Murdoch—"

"Father will look after him."

She moved a few steps away and soon found the ball. "Come on; through the wood is quickest. We have to put it on the Polgrue churchyard wall."

No one accosted them as they ran through the wood. Fireworks

and shouting in the valley suggested that Lostmid and Polgrue had sunk their differences in glorious saturnalia.

"Full surgery tomorrow," remarked Clarissa, tucking the Furry Ball into its niche. "Won't someone be surprised to see this." Ian led her back into the woods. He was on fire with the delight of embracing that lithe, consenting wildness, and he had in mind a bracken-bank that lay beside the golf-course. A hunter's moon was just beginning to rise.

Some time later, when Ian and Clarissa strolled up to the terrace, they found Sir Murdoch and the doctor amicably drinking port. Sir Murdoch looked like a man who had had a festering grudge removed from his mind. "Well," the doctor said cheerfully," we've cleared up some misunderstandings."

But Sir Murdoch had stood up and gone to meet Clarissa.

"As I am a man," he said gravely, "I do think this lady To be my child."

The two pairs of golden eyes met and acknowledged each other.

"That'll be the end of his little trouble, I shouldn't wonder," murmured the doctor. "Specially if she'll live at the Hall and keep an eye on him."

"But she's going to marry me."

"All the better, my dear boy, all the better. And glad I shall be to get rid of her, bless her heart."

Ian looked doubtfully across the terrace at his future father-in-law, but he recalled that wolves are among the most devoted fathers of the animal kingdom. Sir Murdoch was stroking Clarissa's hair with an expression of complete peace and happiness. Then a thought struck Ian. "If he's her father—"

But Dr. Defoe was yawning. "I'm off to bed. Busy day tomorrow." He vanished among the dark trees.

So they were married, and lived happily at the Hall. Clarissa's slightest wish was law. She was cherished equally by both father and husband, and if they went out of their way not to cross her in any particular, this was due quite as much to the love they bore her as to their knowledge that they had dangerous material on their hands.

© Joan Aiken 1958

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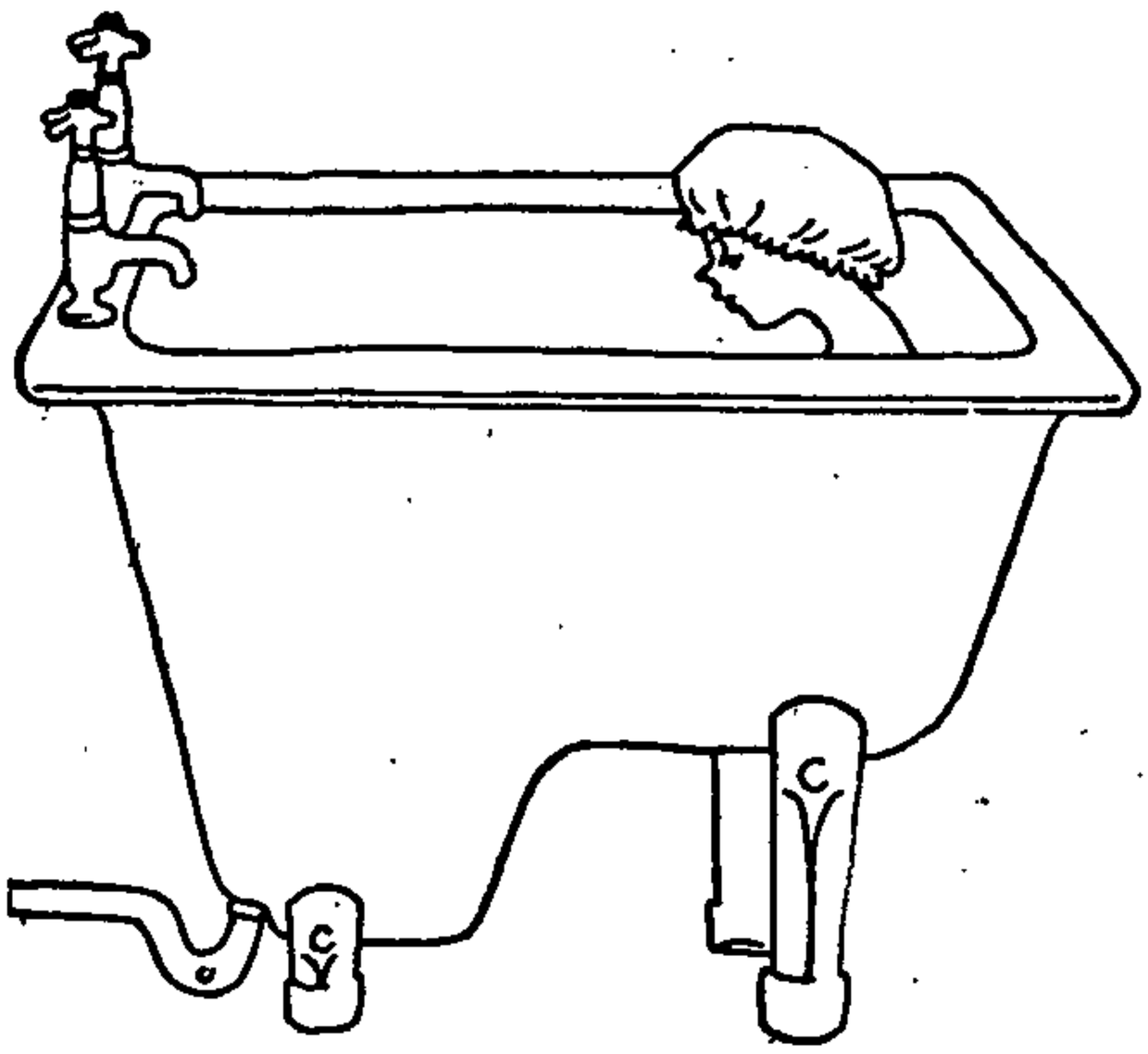
SAVING GRACE

"What does *frugal* mean?" a little girl once asked her mother.

"Frugal? It means saving," the mum replied.

And so, some years later, when the little girl was being chased through the forest by a wolf, she shouted, "Frugal me! Frugal me!" to a handsome young man.

And he frugalled her, and they lived happily ever after.



BEAUTIES OF BATH

I used your soap two years ago, since then I have used no other.

Punch, 1884

Dips for two
And two for dips,
I'll loofah you*
(Woops, mind the drips !)
While you give me a lathery
Shampoo.
We will do this frequently—
Then you weigh you while I shave me
Can't you see how clean we both shall be.
**All the world loves a loofah !*

JAMES S. FIDGEN, *A Madrigal in the Bath*

Soft Soap

She moved off through the silent water, her dark head a shade on the quiet ripples, hardly stirring the black, round plates of the water lilies. Ah Lai slipped off his clothes, shivered as he put a toe into the water . . . He waded in farther, upright now. The cool water rose to his waist, to his chest.

Honeysuckle came up in front of him from her noiseless dive. She was holding one foot close to her face.

"Something sharp on the bottom," she said. "Carry me."

He picked her up and waded to the shore. She was unaccountably warm in his arms, and her hands clung to his shoulders when he put her down and knelt beside her.

"You are very strong," Honeysuckle told him, in woman's earliest gambit.

KEITH WEST, *Ma Wei Slope*

Tale of a Tub

When I was young I'd lose the "Lux"
And there I'd sit and grope.
But now I've got over that, my boys,
And I don't use any soap.

I'd leave black lines around the bath
And rile the landlady's daughter.
But now I've got over that, my boys,
And I don't use any water.

At first I found it rather cool
And feared I'd come to hurt.
But now I've got over that, my boys,
And I don't take off my shirt.

E. S. GOODWIN

Creamy Complexion

Her toilet took her a long time. Each of her many curls had to be twisted round a little stick, tied with thread, and then wetted with rosewater, before her hair was fanned dry. Her skin was very fair, almost the colour of her pearls, and every day she bathed in fresh goats' milk and rubbed her hands with sheep's cream to keep them smooth.

JOAN GRANT, *Winged Pharaoh*

Bath Chaps

It was in June, and 'twas on Barnaby bright too
A time when the days are long, and nights are short,
A crew of merry Girles, and that in the night too,
Resolv'd to wash in a river, and there to sport :
And there (poor things) they then resolved to be merry too,
And with them did bring good store of junketting stuffe,
As Bisket, and Cakes, and Sugar, and Syder, and Perry too
Of each such a quantity, that was more than enough.
But now comes out the Tale I meant to tell ye,
For a Crew of Jovial Lads were there before . . . .
Then each at other did make a pass at kissing then,
And round it went to every level coile . . .
Then hand in hand they all together marcht away,
And every lad convey'd his Mistris home,
Agen they kist, then every Lass her man did pray,
That what had past, no more of that but Mum.

Westminster Drollery, 1672

BLOOD ON THE SCALES

MICHAEL GILBERT

Superintendent Haxtell is on the murder of 9-year-old Corinne Hart, and the Crown Road police already have their hands full, when on Guy Fawkes' night three excited, black-faced schoolboys find the body of a woman on the lonely bank of Binford Park Reservoir. Detective Sergeant Petrella goes to investigate. She is dark-haired, about thirty-five, shot by a bullet at close range. Petrella finds a paper of Sept. 28 by the body. He traces missing pages which feature the story of Monk Bezley's prison break. Petrella remembers seeing Monk's wife, Rosa, at his trial . . . she was dark-haired, about thirty-five. Monk has not been recaptured.

The inquest on Rosa Bezley is adjourned for fifteen days. Robins, the pawnbroker, hands Petrella a diamond clasp, part of the stuff Monk had lifted from Colegrave's. 'Boot Howton, Monk Bezley's No. 2, takes over Monk's Camden Town gang.

Called to one of their haunts, a canal pub, Petrella breaks in, finds Superintendent Gover, his head smashed, lying in a pool of blood.

"I looked in at the hospital this morning," said Petrella, "Gover's still unconscious." He himself had a big blue bruise in the middle of his forehead, and the corner of his right eye was held together by a strip of sticking-plaster.

"You don't look more than two-parts conscious yourself," said Chief Superintendent Barstow amiably. He stared at the blotting-paper in front of him.

"I'm going to ask Central to let us have someone to take on the

Reservoir case, until you're free," he said to Superintendent Haxtell. "It's turned into a gang matter now. If Howton and his friends are mixed up in it—and it looks as if they are—S and D Divisions are as much concerned in this as we are in Q, so it won't do any harm having someone from Headquarters to co-ordinate."

But he was arguing with himself, and the others knew it. For the head of one of the London Districts to call in a Detective Superintendent from the Central pool at Scotland Yard is quite rare enough to be remarkable, and remarked upon.

"It shouldn't be for long," said Haxtell. "I'm nearly through with the Corinne Hart case."

Barstow turned to Petrella. "Until they send someone else, you're in charge. Don't lose your head. There's plenty of routine stuff to do, so I won't keep you." Petrella removed himself.

It was true that there was plenty to do, and he stood turning over in his mind what he ought to do next. The reservoir could wait. If there were any clues there, they would keep for a bit longer. At the moment it was people, not things, that mattered.

He told the Duty Sergeant where he was going, and set out.

Corum Street lies on the Chalk Farm side of Camden Town, in an area which has been slipping downhill for a hundred years with the stealthy inevitability of a glacier. Petrella climbed the crumbling front steps of No. 39, stepped past a battery of empty milk bottles, and studied the row of cards and bells.

Flat D. Mrs. Jean Fraser. Three rings.

He rang and waited. Nothing happened, for a long time.

He pushed on the front door which opened, revealing a strip of linoleum and a marble reproduction of the Winged Victory of Samothrace covered with a bee-veil. The hallway was clean enough, and there was a faint smell of floor-polish: but there was a much stronger smell of people: of too many people living together in too little space.

Flat D was on the third floor. Petrella rang three more times and knocked three times, and breathed in three times and out three times, but Flat D remained unresponsive. He was about to go when the door opposite opened and an old man came out. He had white hair, a white moustache, and a look of forgotten campaigns.

"You're wanting Jean?" he said.

"Yes," said Petrella. "Mrs. Fraser."

"She's out all day. At work, you know."

"It's rather important," said Petrella. "I wonder—do you happen to know where she works?"

The old man shook his head. He thought it was something to do with toffee. His mind was clearly on the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. "She's generally back by seven," he said.

Petrella thanked him and withdrew. He spent the rest of the morning in an endeavour, which he knew to be fruitless when he started on it, but which had to be carried through, to identify certain unidentifiable articles of clothing and footwear.

It was early afternoon when he got back to Crown Road Police Station, and the first thing that caught his eye was a deep, fresh scratch on the linoleum in the passage, which seemed to indicate that some heavy furniture had been moved. Then he saw a white card, pinned to the door of the Interview Room:

DETECTIVE SUPERINTENDENT C. O. KELLAWAY
DETECTIVE SERGEANT ALBERT DODDS

The reinforcements had arrived.

"They're doing us proud," said Petrella to Sergeant Gwilliam.

"We'll be in the headlines all right now," said Gwilliam.

There are, and there always will be certain detective officers whom the public takes to its heart. They are usually members of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard which the newspapers style the Murder Squad, although its work is by no means confined to murders. Their appearance, and reappearance, in the press as they speed to all parts of England to help the provincial forces ensures them a steady flow of publicity; a matter which some of them deplore more than others. Big, handsome, black-haired, strong-chinned Chris Kellaway—as he was known to a million readers of the daily and Sunday press—deplored it not at all.

"He's a great man for bull," said Petrella, "but he seems to get results."

"Quite a change from Gentle Gover," agreed Gwilliam. "You'd better go and say hullo. He wants to see you."

When Petrella went in Kellaway was alone, but his presence filled the tiny room. He got up, squeezed out from behind his

desk, shook hands with Petrella, and took up a stand in front of the empty fireplace.

" I'm glad to have you working with me on the Reservoir case," he said. " I did a job with Luard the other day and he told me about you. He said you were the only man in the C.I.D. who could tell the difference between claret and burgundy without looking at the label on the bottle."

" Luard and I were at recruit school together," said Petrella. " You've got to make allowances for that."

" I never make allowances," said Kellaway, " for myself or anyone else. That's why I'm so damned unpopular." He grinned, showing teeth as big and as white as Red Riding Hood's grandmother's. " Now about this case. I'll tell you what I think—then we shall all start by thinking the same."

Petrella could only recall, such was the impact of Kellaway's personality, that at the time this sounded like sense. What Kellaway thought, his subordinates would naturally think too.

" This is a gang killing. Howton and his friends—the Camden Town mob, or whatever fancy name they're using now. They're all the same, these mobs. First they throw their weight about with people who are scared of them, and they get away with it. And that makes them feel good. Then they go a bit farther, and perhaps they get away with that. Now they've used their feet on a police officer, which means they're asking for trouble. If Charlie Gover dies, they know just what's coming to them. And I'm here to see they get it, good and hot and strong."

Petrella was on the point of asking what the connection was between the assault on Gover and the death of Rosa Bezley, but it occurred to him, in time, that it would be taken as impertinence. And he had no desire at all to be impertinent. He found Kellaway as exhilarating as rough wine drunk in the heat of the day.

" I'm going to split this business into two parts," the Superintendent went on. " You and Dodds—you know Albert? "

" Yes, I know Dodds."

" I'm sure you'll get on well together. You're to tackle it from the reservoir end. Go through the whole place, take it to pieces. Question everyone in sight. I needn't tell you. Meanwhile I'm going to work at the other end—I'm going after Howton. If we both do our jobs properly, sooner or later—" the Superintendent laid his strong white hands on the desk in front of him, index fingers extended—" our ends'll meet." As the tips of the fingers came closer, Petrella would not have been in the least surprised to see a spark jump across the gap.

He said rather breathlessly, " Right, sir. That's quite clear. I'll be getting on with it. As a matter of fact, I'd arranged to have a word with the woman Rosa Bezley shared rooms with. She's a Scotswoman called Jean Fraser."

" I won't stand in your way," said Kellaway genially. " Watch out, though. I know these Scots girls . . ."

Petrella found Sergeant Dodds on the bank of the reservoir, a

squat, swarthy, cheerful character with a look of the Foreign Legion about him. He knew him as a top-ranking darts player.

"What cheer, Pat," he said. "Come and tell me where I start."

Petrella grinned. "I suppose we ought to drag the reservoir," he said.

"Have you ever done it?" said Dodds. "I dragged a canal once, near Woking. It took a week to do the job properly. Now if you took the area of that canal, and divided it into this reservoir, it'd go about a hundred times, which means that this time next year we'd have just about worked up to the halfway line."

"I don't think it's much good crawling round all those bushes on the bank."

Dodds shuddered.

"On the other hand," went on Petrella, "it occurred to me that it might be worth starting by looking for the boat."

"What boat?"

"The one that belongs in the boat-house, down there, at the bottom of the cottage garden." They went to have a look.

"There could have been a boat here," agreed Dodds. "Not to say there's anything fishy about it being missing. The Water Board might have moved it."

"Let's have a word with the foreman."

Dodds said, "Yes, let's." It was clear that any activity was welcome that postponed the moment when he might have to start crawling through a quarter of a mile of wet, tangled, and steeply sloping shrubbery.

The foreman agreed that it was a funny thing about the boat. He had thought so before, but it hadn't been his place to speak, the boat not being in his charge. Anyway, when Ricketts' successor came along the matter would probably be cleared up.

"Ricketts?"

"Intake attendant," said Petrella. "Lived in that cottage until quite recently. Got fed up and walked out on them."

"He couldn't take the boat with him, hardly," said the foreman. "If it was there before, it'll be about somewhere."

"How often," said Dodds, "do you have occasion to search through this little lot?". He indicated the shrubbery.

"Nothing to do with me," said the foreman. "My job's to keep the cut clear. I believe they have it thinned out about once every two years."

"And that's the sort of service we pay our water-rates for," said Dodds. "Come on, Patrick. You go one way and I'll go the other, and we'll meet at the far end—if we're still alive."

It was Petrella who found the boat. He had reached a point on the west bank, towards the northern tip of the reservoir, immediately under a path which led up to a high, stockaded fence. Behind the fence, he guessed, must lie the railway workshops; and beyond them again, the main line.

What he actually saw was a short piece of rusty chain wound

twice round a stake at the water's edge. The other end seemed at first sight to be made fast under water but, when he bent his back and pulled, there was a faint stirring of free movement.

He shouted to Dodds and between them they hauled from the water, and halfway up on to the concrete apron, the remains of an old pram dinghy.

"Stove in," said Dodds. "Stove in and left to rot." There were two big holes in the bottom. "Probably did it with the butt of an oar. I don't suppose those are far away either."

The prospect of something tangible to look for seemed to have revived his spirits. In ten minutes they had retrieved from the bushes beside the path two oars, three duck-boards, a footrest, and two cork fenders.

"Signs of thought, here," said Dodds. He surveyed the salvage. "Someone takes this boat from the boatshed. Rows across to the north end of the reservoir and sinks the boat. But first he takes out anything that might float and give him away. Right?"

"Right."

"Then he goes up this path—turns right at the top, because it's the only way he perishing well can turn and—what next?"

"He climbs the fence. One foot on that tree stump, another on that bolt head, like so. A bit of a pull—and he's up."

Petrella straddled the fence, puffing slightly.

"Tarzan of the North London Water Board," said Dodds approvingly. "What's on the other side?"

"It's a yard," said Petrella, "and a lot of workshops, and a light railway line, and—yes—a gate out to the road."

"That's it, then. That's the way he went."

"Quite a few people about."

"Not at night."

"Not so easy at night. Unless he'd worked it all out beforehand."

"Of course he'd worked it out beforehand," said Dodds. "This is a murderer, we're talking about. A careful chap."

Petrella returned to earth, and dusted himself down. "The only thing I don't see," he said, "is why he should do it at all. Why didn't he go out of the main gate? At that time of night it'd be safe enough. A lot safer than all this caper."

"Don't run before you can walk," said Dodds. "Everything will be clear as daylight before we've finished. Talking of which, we can't do much more this evening. I spotted a nice little pub on the way in. Got a dartboard, too. Let's go and earn ourselves a pint."

"Not more than one, then," said Petrella weakly. "I've got a date with a girl."

When he got to Corum Street, he found that life had ebbed back into its derelict creeks and backwaters. Most of the windows had lights in them, and there were two empty prams in the hall.

He knocked on the door of Flat D.

A voice said, " Come along in, whoever you are."

Petrella pushed open the door and looked inside. There was no front hall. Flat D proved to be two intercommunicating rooms. The nearer of them was a living-room, with one of those contraptions which becomes a bed at the whisk of your hostess' hand: the farther one, as far as he could see through the open door, was a bedroom, which no doubt could equally easily become a sitting-room.

Standing in the communicating doorway was a fluffy-haired, brown-eyed, comfortable-looking woman of thirty—thirty-five? Petrella's bachelor mind boggled at the problem.

" Do I know you? " she said, " or have you come to the wrong flat? " It was a Lowland voice, but it had an inner core of toughness, an acquired metropolitan hardness.

" Mrs. Fraser? "

" That's me."

" I'm Detective Sergeant Petrella."

" Oh, yes."

" I expect you're surprised."

" Not a bit. Is this going to take long enough for me to ask you to sit down? "

" I—well—I don't know."

" Sit down, then," said the lady, relenting a little.

" You said you weren't surprised," said Petrella, settling cautiously into a wicker chair. " Why was that? Most people *are* surprised when—"

" The Colonel—he lives opposite—told me you'd been asking for me this morning. He said, ' From his face you'd call him a schoolboy, but from his boots he's a policeman.' "

" And I thought his mind was miles away."

" Don't let him fool you. That's how he makes his living. But you didn't come to talk about him? "

" No," said Petrella. " I came to talk about Mrs. Bezley. You shared these rooms, didn't you? "

" They're my rooms. She had the use of one of them for a while."

" Could you tell me about that? When she left, and so on? "

Jean Fraser looked at him speculatively.

" If you like," she said, " though it's all ancient history now. She came here in—when would it be?—January or February of this year. Some time about then. She left at the end of September."

" Do you remember which day? "

" How should I remember that? "

" Were you surprised when she left? "

" No more surprised than when she came. If you're a policeman, you'll know that her husband was a criminal."

" Yes. I knew that."

" Well, I can read, Mr.—"

" Petrella."

"That sounds foreign."

"It's Spanish, actually."

"Uh-huh. I was saying, I can read. When I saw in the papers that Monk Bezley was out of prison—and later that he was believed to have escaped abroad—I formed my own conclusions."

"Yes," said Petrella. "I thought that was the way of it. What time of day did she go?"

"I couldn't be certain. I left her here when I went to work in the morning. She was gone when I came back."

"Without taking any of her things with her?"

"That's true. But she hadn't a lot, poor soul."

"Are her things still in the room?"

"Am I a millionairess? It's been let twice since then. There's a Polish lady has it now. Would you like to see it? Madame Jablonski is out. She works in a café. She won't object, I dare say."

"How many times would you say the room has been cleaned since Mrs. Bezley left it?"

"Every day. And repainted and papered last month. Madame did it herself. She's very artistic."

"Then I don't think," said Petrella, "that there's a great deal of point in my looking at it. What became of Rosa's things?"

"I packed them in a bag and put them in the store-room downstairs. Do you want to see them?"

"Yes," said Petrella, "I'll have to do that later, but first, could you tell me—" he was unwrapping the parcel he had brought with him. Mrs. Fraser seemed to sense something either from his tone of voice or from his movements, and she was suddenly still.

"Do you recognize this dress? Or any of these clothes? Or the shoes?"

In the silence he heard a a door open on the top landing and footsteps coming down the stairs.

"Where did you get them?" It was a whisper.

"I'll tell you in a moment," said Petrella. "First, if you don't mind—are they Mrs. Bezley's?"

"Yes." She had scarcely looked at them. "They're hers. In fact, two of them—that and that—are mine. I lent them to her. Where did you find them?"

"We found a woman," said Petrella, "on the bank of one of the reservoirs. You might have seen it in the papers—"

"And that was Rosa."

"From what you tell me, there seems no doubt about it at all."

"And how—what had happened? Can you tell me that?"

"She had been shot. That's in the papers now."

"By her husband?"

"We don't know that."

"It would be her husband. Who else?"

"We may have to ask you to identify the body. Unless we can find a relative. Would you do that?"

"She'd no relatives down here that I know of. She came from

Ayrshire. It's where I'm from myself, that's how we came to be friends. Yes. I'll identify her, if I have to."

"We may be able to do it some other way."

"I'll give you the name of the place where I work." She scribbled on a piece of paper. "It's a place that makes sweets. Don't come after me there. I've a reputation to lose."

Petrella promised. Out in the street, it had started to rain again. He turned up the collar of his coat against it, and stumped off. He was thinking about Mrs. Fraser, and how nice she was, and how poor. 'And that she had become neither hysterical, nor self-important about the violent death of her friend. He was thinking too deeply to have an eye out for his surroundings, and he missed a quick movement. Behind him, a man had detached himself from the shadows and moved cautiously out. Slowly though he moved, the dip and roll of his progress was unmistakable.

Boot Howton looked first to right and left, climbed the steps of No. 39, and disappeared into the hall.

Petrella was down at the reservoir by half past eight next morning. It was a calm, bright, cold winter's day, a day of nipped fingers and steaming breath. He found Sergeant Dodds already at work.

A lorry and trailer stood in the open space in front of the cottage, and Dodds and three men were off-loading a flat-bottomed boat. It looked like an infantry assault craft.

"Now you have got out of bed," said Dodds, "you can come and lend a hand. I'm warning you, it's a lot heavier than it looks."

Between them they staggered on to the landing-stage, lowered one side, lifted the other, and heaved. The boat hit the surface with a solid ker-splash, sending a long ripple out over the surface of the water, and fetching a protest from a sleepy swan.

"She floats," said Dodds. "What next, George?"

"The detector gear has to be fixed in," said the young man who seemed to be in charge of the party. "We can handle that now. Just tell us the line you want to take."

"You're to cover a strip," said Dodds, "ten or twelve feet wide. Say two yards either side of the boat. Go straight across from this landing-stage to the far end. There's a point you can lay on where a path goes up through the bushes."

"I'll walk round in a minute and stick a flag in," said the young man. "You show me just where you want it. It's going to take a bit of time to rig the gear. I'll tell you when we're ready."

He went into a huddle with his two mechanics, and Petrella heard snatches of conversation about something which sounded like the fixer magnet. Then all three men went to the lorry and started rolling back the tarpaulin.

"What's it all about?"

"Just a bit of Chris Kellaway's famous drive and efficiency," said Dodds. "This is an up-to-date salvage unit. George, here, does the frog stuff. The other two operate the box of tricks."

"Box of tricks?"

"It's a detector. Something the Navy dreamed up for dealing with limpet mines. You drag an electrical gadget across the bottom and if it comes within smelling distance of any metal it goes ping. In fact, it goes several different sorts of ping, and the bright boy sitting in the boat can tell how much metal, and what sort, and how far off, and so on."

"And then the frogman goes down and has a look at it?"

"Right. And rather him than me this weather."

"I don't know," said Petrella. "You can wear warm clothes inside the suit. As a matter of fact, I've always wanted—"

"Not today," said Dodds. "Have a heart. You get it out of your system some other time. This is strictly a professional job."

One of the men in the boat looked up from screwing an instrument panel to the cross-thwart of the boat and said, "How deep's the water?"

Dodds consulted his plan. "Twenty feet in the middle," he said. "Six feet at the sides. Gravel bottom, shelving gently. Piece of cake."

The man grunted, picked up a ratchet screwdriver, and screwed in a screw as if he hated it.

"You've got to hand it to Chris," said Dodds. "He does get ideas—sometimes. You take an ordinary piece of water, a pond or a river or a canal. You put a sensitive bit of machinery like this over it, and what happens? Ping—and up comes an old kettle. Ping-ping, and it's a wash-tub with a hole in it. Ping-ping-ping, and it's an—"

"I get your point," said Petrella.

"Here you've got a nice clear bottom. Shouldn't be anything there except water. So every time she sounds off, it's worth going down to have a look."

"And you're starting on this particular line because you think that whoever took the boat rowed her straight across and may have dropped—something or other—overboard. What *are* we hoping to find?"

"Like all good policemen," said Dodds, "we're keeping strictly open minds."

The diver now appeared, carrying a red-and-white survey flag on a stick, and he and Dodds wandered off together to mark the aiming point.

Petrella looked at his watch and remembered that the reason he was there was that he had a date with Mr. Lundgren at nine o'clock.

Punctual to the minute a smart little car drew up on the gravel sweep and the Resident Supply Engineer jumped out.

"Good morning, Sergeant," he said. "How are things progressing—what on earth's going on?"

"It's a treasure hunt—modern style," said Petrella, and explained.

"I hope they don't disturb a pair of little crested grebes," said

Lundgren. "This is the first year they've wintered here. Their nest's over there, near where those two men are standing. What the devil are they waving that flag for?"

Petrella explained this, too.

"Do you mean to say," went on Lundgren, "that you're working on the assumption that the murderer shot this woman—she was shot, wasn't she? I thought it said so in the paper?—then took the boat, rowed it across and sank it, and went up the path and climbed over a ten-foot fence. Why didn't he walk out of the front gate? It's locked, but it isn't all that difficult to climb over. I've done it myself before now, and I'm no gymnast."

This was precisely the point that was worrying Petrella, so instead of answering the question he asked one himself. "In fact," he said, "had you noticed that the boat was missing?"

"No," said Lundgren. He sounded a bit upset about this. "I expect we should have spotted it when we made a proper check. That would be when the next man came in."

"And the house?"

"We'll look at that now. I brought the keys with me."

"Are we the first people to go in since Ricketts left?"

"Bless you, no. We may be a bit unbusiness-like, but we're not as bad as that. One of our property managers went over it as soon as we heard Ricketts had gone. Turned off the gas and electricity, and checked that Ricketts hadn't walked off with any of the Board's property."

"And had he?"

"On the contrary—now which of these two is the front door key?—I seem to remember that he'd left some of his own stuff behind. We had it inventoried and stored away—"

"What sort of things?" he said.

"Bed-linen and curtains and things like that— All these doors are apt to stick. Give it a push—" Cold and dark and silent, the house waited.

"Smells damp to me," said Mr. Lundgren. "We'll have to get it thoroughly aired before the next man comes in. I'll go ahead, and open the shutters."

One door on the right of the tiny hallway opened into the living-room; another, at the end, into the kitchen. The stairs rose straight out of the hall.

"It's a simple sort of but-and-ben," said Lundgren, "but it's handy. There's a nice bedroom, and a modern bathroom and lavatory upstairs. Main drainage, of course. And electricity; only it's turned off just now."

"I expect it's very nice," said Petrella, repressing a shudder, "when it's warm and cheerful. Just at the moment—"

"I'll open the shutters."

They gazed round the living-room.

The carpet had been rolled up, and the floor scrubbed. An imitation-leather sofa and two armchairs were stacked together in front of the unprotected grate.

Petrella ran a finger along the top of the nearest chair, producing a faint powdering of greeny-white mould. Lundgren was right. The place was damp.

"We had it cleaned right out. I expect we shall redecorate before the next man comes in."

"Yes," said Petrella. "What I'd like to do is have a word with the man who saw it first. Did he get the impression that Ricketts had taken his time about going? Had he packed all his things up carefully? That'd take time, you see."

"I'm not sure," said Lundgren. "There may be something in the report—I'll look at it when I get back to the office."

"Let's go upstairs," said Petrella.

The bedroom was furnished simply with a bed, now stripped to its springs, a chest of drawers, and a cupboard. The chest and cupboard were empty and clean.

"Some of the things left in here would certainly have been his," said Lundgren. "The sheets and pillow-cases, for instance. The blankets and bedding were supplied by us. That vase now, I'm not sure—"

"Even if I'd had plenty of time," said Petrella, "I think I might have managed to leave that behind." The vase was pink, and embossed with tiny green oyster-shells, which formed the words, *A Present from Whitstable.*

"Not absolutely my taste," agreed Lundgren, "but some people like that sort of thing. Here's the bathroom." This, too, was bare, except for a cork bath mat, and several dozen rusty razor blades on the medicine cupboard.

"Well, he took his tooth-brush," said Lundgren.

"And his towel. Let's try the kitchen."

Here there was more to be seen. The room had been scrubbed and tidied, but they found a cupboard full of tins and packets—cornflour, tea, sugar (turned by the damp into a granular lump), and other accessories of the kitchen. In the larder stood a plate with a remnant on it that defied immediate analysis. There was a crusted saucepan pushed away on a shelf over the gas stove, and beside it a dry kettle.

"It'd be interesting, too, to know if he left any washing-up behind him. That'd be a pointer to the time of day he left. Perhaps your man could tell us that? And by the way—I don't think I ever asked you—what day did he go?"

"Now that I can tell you exactly," said Lundgren. "I found the copy of his telegram on my desk when I got to my office that Monday. It had been sent off two days before, on Saturday night."

Petrella swallowed hard. "Saturday?"

"That's right. Saturday, September 28th. I was due to start my holiday in the Lakes on the following Friday—that's how I know."

The world, which had been rotating comfortably on its axis, stood still; then started again with a lurch. Petrella said softly,

"What a fool! What a fool! What a brainless, clueless fool!"

Lundgren gaped at him.

"Myself, I mean. Fool, not to ask such an obvious question right at the start."

"Is the date important?"

"Certainly it's important. In fact, right now it's the most important thing in the case. We've got to get hold of Ricketts, and get hold of him quick. Do you know where he is?"

"Well," said Mr. Lundgren. "No. Really, I'm afraid I don't. We never made any effort to trace him. We were sorry he left us, but he wasn't a criminal or anything. Why is it suddenly so important to know where he is?"

From outside, on the reservoir, there came a shout. One of the men in the boat was on his feet and was calling to the bank. Then the excitement seemed to subside. The man sat down again.

In this space of time, Petrella had come to an important conclusion. He wanted Lundgren's help. And he would only get it at the cost of telling him the truth or a good deal of it. And this he did . . .

When Petrella had finished, Lundgren said, "It sounds pretty conclusive to me. The woman was Rosa Bezley, you say?"

"Almost certainly. The dental check should be conclusive."

"And she was killed on Saturday, September 28th. Most probably in the afternoon or evening, wouldn't you think? The other men go off duty at one o'clock on a Saturday, except for Ricketts."

"Exactly," said Petrella. "Except for Ricketts. And your evidence shows that he cleared out that same evening. Do you happen to remember exactly what time his telegram to you was sent off?"

"I don't remember," said Lundgren, "but I've got the confirmatory copy in my files. I can run you back to my office in the car."

"Grand. I'll have to telephone my Superintendent. We'll arrange to have this place gone over thoroughly. And I'll need help for that."

Petrella caught Kellaway at his desk and told him what had happened. After he had finished speaking there was a very slight pause. It was as if the Superintendent was trying to fit the news into an existing pattern of notions, and the rough edges would not quite match. Then he said, "Yes, of course. That's a vital piece of news. I'll have a team sent down right away to go over that cottage with a tooth-comb. Keep on at the Ricketts angle and let me know what happens."

In Lundgren's office, a little research produced the telegram. "That's our private stamp," said Lundgren. "It shows that it was dealt with here on the morning of September 30th. Otherwise it's exactly as it was received. Dispatched from Leicester Square Head Post Office, you see, at 9.45 p.m."

The telegram was addressed: *Metropolitan Water Board North-*

west Area. It said, *Am leaving job and cottage tonight. Going Blackpool. Regret inconvenience. Writing, Ricketts.*

"Terse, and to the point," said Petrella.

"It was a considerable shock," said Lundgren. "When a man pulls out suddenly like that, you can't help wondering if everything's in order in his department. Not that Ricketts handled any of our money."

"Everything at the cottage was in order? And his gear?"

"Unless he was responsible for the boat, there weren't any deficiencies at all. As a matter of fact, we were in pocket by two weeks' pay. For some reason he hadn't drawn it that Friday or the Friday before."

"Sounds like a capitalist."

"It's odd you should say that," said Lundgren. "He didn't make any sort of show, but I had the impression that he wasn't broke by any means. I can't remember why I thought it. He always dressed well off duty."

"I take it he didn't write from Blackpool."

"Not a word."

Petrella said, "I seem to remember you telling me that you were in the Army with Ricketts."

"That's right. He was in my Battery for a few months during the war. We used him in the Battery Office for clerical duties. He was as fit as a fiddle, but a bit over age for work on the gun."

"Tell me all that you can remember about him."

Lundgren considered. "I remember him best," he said, "in the very first months of the war. We were all new to our jobs, and feeling our way as we went. That was when the old soldier came into his own. Ricketts was just that—an old soldier par excellence."

"A regular?"

"No. I don't think so. I mean that he'd seen service in the First World War, and active service at that. He wore the ribbon of the M.M. I believe he lied about his age to get to the front."

Petrella made a calculation. "If he was seventeen or thereabouts at the end of the First War, he'd be in his late fifties now."

"That's about right. He was nearly forty at the beginning of the last war. An active, vigorous, handsome man. Hair going a bit grey, but that somehow gave him an extra touch of dependability. And he certainly knew how to get things done. He was an extra right hand to an inexperienced subaltern like me. You know the sort of man."

"Yes," said Petrella. "The only thing is—don't take this the wrong way—he seems a bit too good for the job he landed up in."

"I had just the same thought myself," said Lundgren. "I assumed he was hard up, and left it at that."

"Did he say anything about it? Why he wanted the job—and so on?"

"Not a word. I gather one of the attractions was the cottage."

"And that was—how long ago?"

"Two years, almost to the day. He started work in September.

And I patted myself on the back that the Board had made a good bargain."

"No complaints?"

"None at all. It wasn't very exacting work. But he did it excellently."

Petrella picked up the telegram and read through it again.

"And you never took any steps to trace him?"

"We had no reason to. As I said, his account was in credit—"

"And at the time you had no doubt that this telegram came from Ricketts."

Lundgren looked up quickly. "I haven't any doubt about it now," he said. "What are you getting at?"

"*Didn't it strike you as odd that the telegram shouldn't have* been addressed to you personally? It must have been intended as a sort of farewell message. And it was you who got him the job. If there was anyone he was letting down, it was you."

"Yes."

"If he felt shy of addressing it to you by name—and he may have been—why not, Resident Supply Engineer, with the proper address of your office? I suppose he knew it? Just to put, Metropolitan Water Board, North-west Area—isn't that a bit risky? It might have landed up in anyone's in-tray."

"It never occurred to me," said Lundgren slowly. "In fact, you see, this is the headquarters, so it naturally came to me. What's your idea about it?"

"I couldn't help noticing that there's a board up outside the reservoir with exactly those words on it. It struck me that if someone who didn't know much about your set-up wanted to send a telegram as if it came from Ricketts, that's just how he'd address it."

Lundgren stared at Petrella. "If that's right, where's Ricketts?"

The telephone on the desk saved Petrella the difficulty of answering. Lundgren picked it up and said, "Yes?" Listened for a moment. "Yes, he's here with me now. Hold on," and to Petrella, "It's for you."

"It can't be," said Petrella. "No one knows I'm here. Hullo."

"We've been looking for you," said the voice of Sergeant Dodds. "You're to come back to the reservoir, as quick as possible."

"What's happening? How did you know where I was?"

"The Dodds bush telegraph system. I can't tell you anything more on this line. But we've found something."

"There she is," said Sergeant Dodds. "Wotter beauty!"

In the reservoir cottage, a clean sheet of lining paper had been spread on the living-room table, and in the middle of the paper lay a pistol.

"Considering it's been under water all that time it's not in bad shape at all, would you say?"

It was an automatic, of about the same size as a .45, its working parts of dull metal, its handle of some black synthetic stuff.

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It had, as Sergeant Dodds said, stood up well to its immersion.

" I'd guess it had been pretty well greased up, too," said Dodds. " Packed away in grease probably."

" What sort is it? I've never seen one like it."

" You've never seen one like it! That's because you're young and innocent. You'd have seen plenty of them the other side of the Channel in 1945. It's a German Army pistol. This is the regular issue job. It's a good gun, too. I've used one myself. Reliable up to twenty-five yards."

There came the sound of a car door slamming. Dodds jumped across to the window. " It's Chris. And I bet he's pleased with life. Talk about a hunch."

It was Superintendent Kellaway. He bounced into the room like the favourite coming out into the ring under the bright arc lights. He was followed more slowly by a fat person with a head of black curly hair and the tight smile of a man who knows what he is talking about.

" I got hold of Charlie Fenwick as soon as I heard your news," said Kellaway, " and brought him along. We'll turn the gun over to him and he'll tell us all about it."

The fat man picked up the gun carefully but firmly, like an experienced nurse handling a difficult baby.

" A P.38," he said. " The normal army type. Too common to be much use for identification. You might get something out of the silencer, though." He pointed to the bulbous extension, so welded by time and rust to the barrel that it seemed to be part of it. " I don't think the P.38 was issued with a silencer. I'd say that one's an old Mauser silencer, been adapted. Damn dangerous things. I'd never fire a gun myself with one on. A fraction out of alignment and the whole thing goes off in your face."

As he spoke his pudgy hands were exploring the weapon, pressing and twisting. Now he gave the whole gun a sharp smack and the magazine clattered out on the table.

" How long did you say this'd been in the water? "

" If we're right, six or seven weeks."

" Then someone took damned good care of it before it went in. Otherwise it'd be rusted solid by this time." He picked up the magazine carefully, holding it by the edges with the tips of his thick but curiously delicate fingers.

" How many have been fired? " asked Kellaway.

" The maximum load's nine. I can count six here in the clip. Which is in quite remarkably good order, by the way. No sign of rust at all. There's probably one up the spout. It could have been fired twice or it could have been fired three times."

" Summerson called it a .455 bullet," said Kellaway.

" I've yet to learn," said Fenwick coldly, " that Summerson is a ballistics expert." He was still examining the magazine, holding it under the full light of the window. Now he rubbed his fingernail very gently across the surface, and said, " You can feel the mineral jelly it was packed in. Wonderful stuff for waterproofing. Fifty

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times as good as grease. All the same, I don't believe I've ever seen anything quite like that before. Not after such a long immersion. I can only suppose that the magazine was an exceptionally tight fit; perhaps it belonged originally to another gun altogether."

"What are you getting at?" asked Kellaway.

"*If* it was an exceptionally tight fit, and well packed with grease to start with, you might get an airlock. See what I mean? No water would get inside the magazine sleeve at all. Not for a long time, anyway."

"So what?"

"It's not my department. Nothing to do with me at all. But wouldn't you say that was a print?" They crowded round him.

"Can't see a thing," said Kellaway.

"Look. When I tilt her. Now."

"By God," said Kellaway—and the invocation was so heartfelt that it sounded almost reverent—"you're right. It is a sort of print. Right on the panel of the magazine."

"What's saved it," said Fenwick, "is that the moisture couldn't get at it. Wonderful example of the working of Providence. Like the pearl in the oyster. Waiting there till Doomsday for the lucky fisherman."

But Kellaway was not listening. He had stalked away into the middle of the room, and he stood there for a minute while he contemplated the moves which now had to be made. In the weeks that followed, Petrella sometimes found himself looking back to that moment. Making all allowances for luck, full credit had to be given to Kellaway. Laid on a stale scent, within twenty-four hours he had turned up what looked very like the murder weapon, ready furnished with a print of the murderer.

He turned to Dodds. "That search party I organized. What happened to *them*?"

"They're working upstairs. They finished down here."

"Who's in charge?"

"Sergeant Cobbold."

"Is he the camera man?"

"That's right," said Dodds. "A real artist. He's missed his vocation. He ought to be taking snaps on the front."

"Fetch him down. Let's see if we can get a photograph of this print."

Sergeant Cobbold, when it was put to him, said, "Certainly." The electricity had been turned on. He could plug in his lamp and reflector and photograph anything they wanted right away.

Cobbold looked up at the Superintendent, "Might as well do the other one at the same time, sir," he said.

"Other what?"

"Print," said Cobbold, looking surprised. "Didn't you know we found a set of prints in here? Very nice ones, too." He walked across to the window. "On the upright. The middle one, sort of embedded in the paintwork. That's why they're still there, I guess." He directed the light of the torch that he held on to the

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spot and they saw, almost startlingly clear, the marks of four fingertips.

"What happened," said Cobbold happily, "is that someone must have come in this window from the outside. That's the way the fingertips are pointing, see. The window's open, and he pulls on this upright to get himself through."

"How long would a print like that last?" said Kellaway.

"Oh, quite a long time. Six months—maybe a year."

"We'll probably find it was the man who did the painting," said Dodds.

"Don't believe it," said Kellaway. He was riding high on his luck. That day, he knew, every jackpot would drop, every outsider come romping home. "Photograph these as well. Then we'll send both lots down to Central and see if we can get a quick identification. If they're the same man—why, then we're going places."

An hour later, Petrella was displaying the freshly-dried positives to Sergeant Blinder.

"Envelope A," he said. "Photograph of a single print, taken from the magazine of a P.38 automatic pistol."

"Do you call that a photograph?" said Sergeant Blinder. "Who took it—Cobbold? You'd have thought, after all the tips I've given him, he'd know how to highlight a photograph."

"The gun it came off had been under water for more than a month. You can't expect too much."

"There's nothing wrong with the fingerprint," said Sergeant Blinder. "A very nice print indeed. It's the photograph, I'm complaining about. These boys will use overhead lighting. I've told them time and time again that a lateral beam—"

"Here," said Petrella hastily, "we have envelope B. A set of four fingerprints of the right hand found on the paintwork of a window jamb. We think it might be off the same man."

"That I can tell you right away they're not," said Sergeant Blinder.

"How *can* you tell?"

"Different altogether."

"I'll take your word for it. If you can make us an identification —it really is rather urgent—Superintendent Kellaway . . ."

Sergeant Blinder sniffed. "When did he want it?"

"Just as soon as possible."

"Not yesterday? Or the day before yesterday?"

Petrella was in no mood for defending Superintendent Kellaway. "No," he said. "Just as quickly as you can, that's all."

He had a lot to do himself. After a quick lunch in the canteen he took himself out to Hounds Green for another word with Lundgren. This proved to be a frustrating afternoon. Lundgren was engaged. Petrella sat in the waiting-room, and read through, *Some notes on Water Purification by the Heck-Mueller system of Discs and Meshes.* When he had finished this, and Lundgren had still failed to appear,

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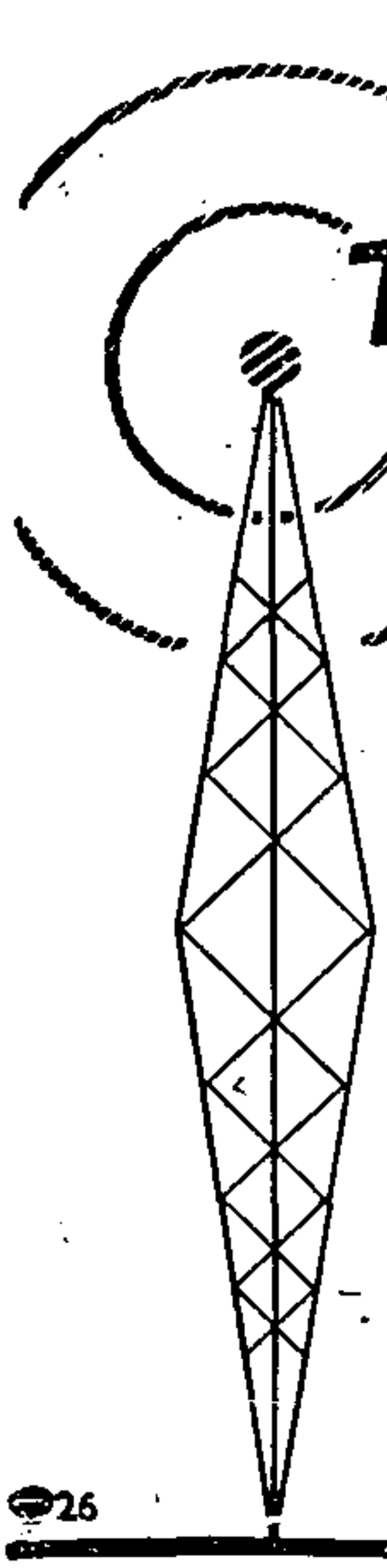

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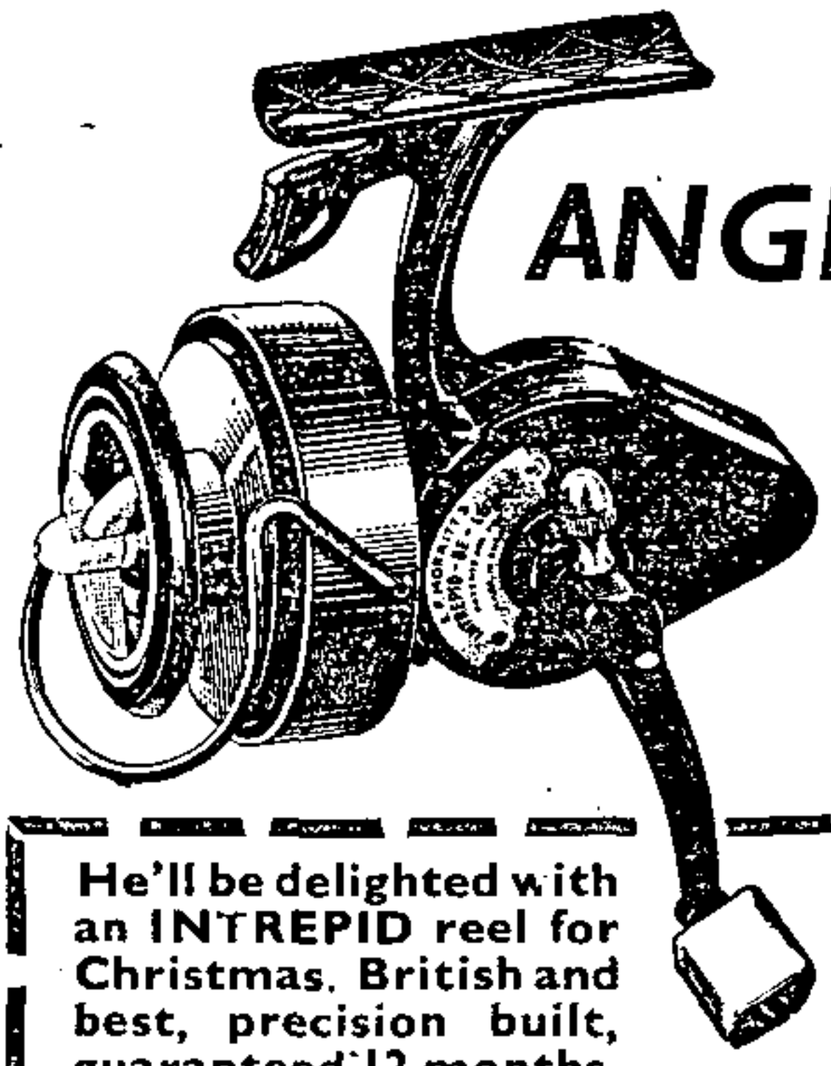

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Subject(s) of interest _____ Nov./58

Petrella settled down to study, *Metropolitan Water Board: Annual Infall Statistics.*

At five o'clock Lundgren finally came in, full of apologies. "I can find out when the cottage was painted last," he said. "My impression is that it was certainly done when Ricketts went in, but there may have been minor maintenance jobs carried out since. As for getting the fingerprints of the painters who carried out the job—I shouldn't think it'd be difficult to find them. Only they might object to having their fingerprints taken."

"We'll need yours, too," said Petrella. "You've been over the house. And your cleaners. If you can give me the names, I'll have someone sent out."

"I'm trying hard not to be inquisitive," said Lundgren, "but I take it—I take it this means you've found something."

"Yes," said Petrella. "But for goodness' sake, keep it under your hat."

It was after six before Petrella got back to Crown Road, guiltily conscious that he had more or less wasted the afternoon. As soon as he entered the corridor he could tell that something had happened.

Dodds shot out of the C.I.D. room, caught sight of him, and said, "There you are, Patrick. Come on, quick," and whisked him into Haxtell's room.

Superintendent Haxtell, the nominal owner of the room, was sitting quietly in one corner, and Chief Superintendent Barstow was installed behind his desk. Kellaway was standing in front of the fire, and a bulky man with crinkly grey hair, whom Petrella knew by sight as Chief Superintendent Burrell, father of the fingerprint department at Scotland Yard, was overflowing the only other chair.

"Now we *are* all here," said Barstow, looking sourly at Petrella, "I'll recapitulate. First, we have evidence that this was a gang killing." Kellaway nodded. "Second, we find a gun which is believed to belong to Howton. He's got a record of violence, and has been taken once with a gun on him."

"Twice. Unlawful possession of firearms. 1946 in Liverpool, and 1951 in London."

"Third, he was friendly with Rosa Bezley. It's reasonable to suppose that her husband getting out of gaol precipitated some sort of crisis—and there's evidence that the killing did in fact take place on the day after he got out.

"Fourth and last, Howton has certainly been in that cottage at some time. From the position of his fingerprints, it looks as if he climbed in at an open window."

"He wouldn't have any reason that we know of for being there egitimately."

Chief Superintendent Barstow considered the matter. To the professionals gathered in the room the trend of his thoughts was as evident as if he had spoken them aloud. He was not an entirely likeable character, not a glad sufferer of fools, not beloved of his

subordinates, but he had, as Petrella had observed, one admirable characteristic: he was capable of making up his mind, and he made it up quickly.

"Not good enough," he said. "Very, very nearly, but not quite. If the print on the gun had been Howton's—"

Petrella looked up quickly.

"—by the way, have you identified that print yet?"

"No, sir," said Kellaway. "I expect we shall, but it's a rather faint, single print, and that's bound to take longer. Of course, it could turn out to be one of Howton's boys."

"If it turns out to be one of Howton's boys, then he's the one we ought to charge with the murder," said Barstow reasonably. "No. The evidence so far is simply that Howton was in the cottage. His fingerprints on the window prove that. We don't know *when* he was there. But it seems highly likely that it was on the night Mrs. Bezley was killed. However, that's conjecture. What we want is positive evidence; either that Howton was seen near the reservoir that night or, perhaps, something to tie him up to the shooting. What about motive?"

"As you said yourself, sir, there must have been some sort of crisis." Kellaway tried to keep the irritation out of his voice. "Monk Bezley had escaped from prison the day before. He'd go straight to the boys. They'd hide him up for the first night. Next day they'd arrange for a meeting with Rosa. She was banker to the outfit. When we put Monk away, you remember, we got very little of the stuff. It now seems clear that Rosa had it stowed somewhere. I'd suggest that she and Howton had been quietly turning it into cash. And maybe quietly spending it on themselves."

"If that was right, Monk would have shot Howton, not his wife."

"I should have thought," said Kellaway, managing to instil just enough deference into his voice, "that the only way to find out the truth was to pull in Howton. We'll get evidence quick enough then. His friends'll all talk, once he's inside."

"No," said Barstow. "It won't do. Get something to tie him to the reservoir, get something to tie him to the jewels, then we'll take a chance and charge him."

Superintendent Haxtell spoke for the first time. He had been sitting so quietly on his bed in the corner that they had all forgotten he was there.

"Corinne Hart," he said, "was killed three streets away from the reservoir." They stared at him.

"In the course of that investigation we've taken statements from more than a thousand people, including every soul living in Ogilvie Street and Mearns Street to the south and south-west of the reservoir, between it and the filter beds. And we didn't just ask them about the night Corinne disappeared. We went back weeks, sometimes months."

"That's a damned good idea," said Barstow. "Get a man going through those reports now, to see if he can pick up anything."

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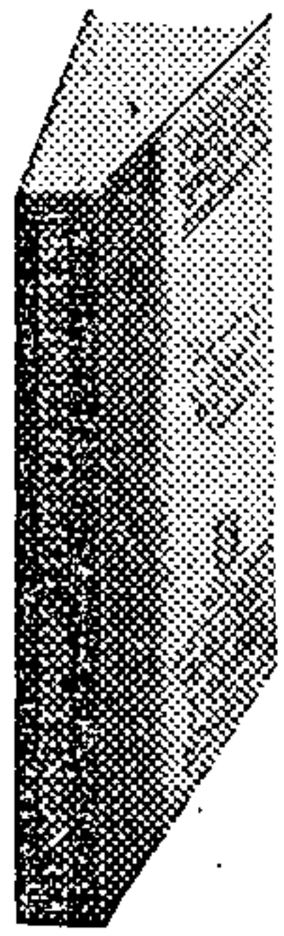

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When the conference was over, Petrella had a quick word with Dodds. "Are you sure they haven't got these prints mixed up?" he said.

"It's an idea," said Dodds, "but I'm afraid it won't wash. The four prints off the window are a set. They belong to Howton. No doubt at all. Burrell doesn't make mistakes about fingerprints. The one on the gun's a single print. They don't even know which hand. It's going to take a lot longer to get anything out of that."

"But whoever it was, it wasn't Howton. At least; that's what Blinder told me."

"Burrell says that, too."

"But it certainly belonged to the man who loaded the gun."

"It isn't always the person who loads a gun that fires it," said Dodds.

Petrella digested this. "What's Kellaway going to do now?"

"If I know our Chris, he's kicking his desk . . . Hullo, there's the bell, we'd better go and see what he wants."

Whatever may have been his private feelings, Kellaway had them well under control. "I'd like you," he said to Petrella, "to see if you can get a line on that jewellery. You know all your local jewellers and pawnbrokers. And I suggest you get a bit of co-operation from Luard in S Division. Between the two of you, you might be able to turn something up. I've had Records make me some copies of Howton's photograph. Take one with you. It might help to stir people's memories."

Which brought Petrella back again to where it had all started, to the back room of Mr. Robins, Jeweller, Silversmith, and Pawnbroker, with its built-in safe and its mighty, brassbound ledger.

When he saw Petrella, Mr. Robins groaned. "I knew it," he said.

"You knew what?"

"That you'd be back. I suppose they told you."

"No one's told me anything," said Petrella. "What have you been up to? Receiving stolen goods?"

Mr. Robins smiled faintly. "Really, it almost looks like it," he said. "After you'd gone I took a copy of that list, the one that had all the Colegrave stuff in it, and went carefully through my deposits. I've identified six different pieces, besides the clasp you were asking me about. None of them are very large. Here's the list I sent to the Station. I thought they'd have passed it on to you."

"I've been a bit elusive these last two days," said Petrella. He cast his eye down the list. The money given by Mr. Robins for the six items totalled just over a hundred pounds, which meant that they were probably worth from twice to three times as much. "Were they all deposited by the same person?"

"That's what's so difficult. I deal with—thirty, forty people every day."

"Does this do anything to your memory?" Petrella took out the photograph of Howton. It was a good photograph. Not one of those close-up profiles taken in a strong light that makes a bishop

look like an axe-murderer, but an informal snapshot of Howton stepping off the pavement.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Robins at last. "I'd say I'd seen him in here. It's not a common sort of face, is it?"

"Do you associate it with these particular pieces of jewellery?"

"All those pieces were deposited here in the last two months. I know that's right, because my book says so. And it's in the last two months that I've seen—what's his name?"

"Howton."

"—I've seen Howton about. The last time was about a week ago, and that reminds me. Dicky!"

A thin, whitefaced, gristly boy put his head round the door and said, "Wassup?"

"It was you took in the ear-drops a week ago yesterday."

"'Sright."

"Can you remember what the customer looked like?"

"Man with a limp, would it be?"

The evening suddenly seemed bright to Petrella; a lot brighter and a lot warmer. "Yes," he said. "Was he anything like this?"

The boy held the photograph up to the light, and looked at it inscrutably. Then he put it down and said, "Do you mind my asking my dad something?"

"Not a bit."

"Alone."

"We'll leave you here," said Mr. Robins, and went out of the door, taking the boy with him.

The minutes dragged by. Then Mr. Robins reappeared.

"That's all right," he said. "He identified him. The ear-drops, and a lady's watch the week before. He's a sharp boy, Dicky. He doesn't make mistakes."

"What was he worried about?"

"He didn't quite know who you were, or what you were after. Don't you worry, he'll make a good witness for you."

"Yes. I rather imagine he will," said Petrella slowly.

Back at Crown Road Police Station he went straight in to report to Dodds. He found the Sergeant in high good humour.

"That's the stuff, boy," he said, "we're getting our feet on the ground in all directions now. Just listen to this. Here's Rebecca Gurney. She lives—I beg her pardon, resides—at 17a Ogilvie Street occupying the ground floor, and has a bow window overlooking the gates of the reservoir, and very little to do in life except look out of it.

"She deposes, 'On the evening of Saturday, September 28th, which I remember because it was my elder sister's birthday, or would have been if she had been alive, she died twenty-five years ago and never have I allowed September 28th to go by without thinking of her, and how I remember it was a Saturday, because the reservoir gates were shut when the men go off after lunch. It was about eight in the evening but still light enough to see. I saw

two men get out of a car which drove off to the top of the road and turned round and waited. The men walked up the road on the opposite pavement and disappeared. An hour later, they came back. It was dark by then but they were on my pavement this time and I saw them both clearly. One of them seemed to be keeping watch. The other climbed over the gate into the reservoir.' Question, 'Why did you not report this?' Answer, 'I was alone in the house and have no telephone. I was afraid to go outside. I did not like the look of the men.' Question, 'Do you recognize this photograph?' Answer, 'I do. That was one of the men. I have never forgotten his face. I considered it to be an evil face. I was unable to sleep that night. I have often thought of it since.'"

"Excellent," said Petrella, who recognized hard evidence when he heard it.

"It's a great thought," said Dodds, "that in almost every street in London, an observant old girl is sitting in a chair, in a bay window, noticing everything that goes on. All you've got to do is to find her."

"What are we going to do now?"

"We're waiting for a telephone call. As soon as it comes, we're going to start the ball rolling. I don't suppose we shall any of us get a lot of sleep tonight."

The call came at half past eight, and it was evidently satisfactory,

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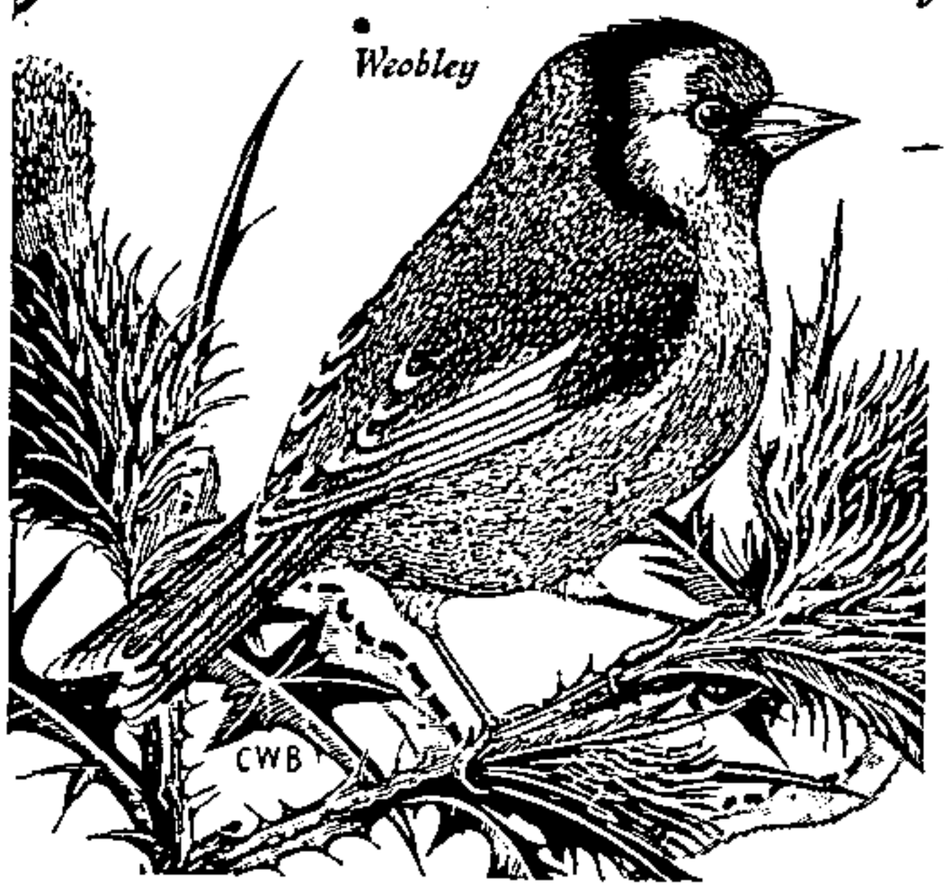

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for Kellaway appeared for a moment in the C.I.D. room to confer with Dodds.

"I'd better wait by the telephone," he said. "Then anyone who has got anything can reach me. Take Patrick with you. The exercise will do him good." He disappeared back into his room with a flash of his great white teeth.

Petrella could not afterwards have mapped out or set down the course they took that evening. It remained in his mind as a succession of sights and sounds and smells as they went from café to café and later, when the cafés were closed, from club to club. From private clubs to members' clubs, and finally to clubs so exclusive that they masqueraded as flats and apartments.

Their mission in these places, a mission which could sometimes be accomplished without actual eating or drinking, was to talk. Dodds did the talking. It was mostly in undertones, but in the end Petrella understood what was being said. The word was out against Howton. Information as to where he was lying would be paid for, in hard cash.

They visited Pino's café and found Luard already busy. Luard grinned at Petrella, and they plunged straight out again into the darkness. There was no time to waste on a place that was already covered. And so the whisper ran, from street corner to street corner, from coffee stall to coffee stall. Telephones woke sleepy men in their beds, who listened, and grunted. Many turned over and went to sleep again. A few decided that a stay in the country would suit their health and packed their bags and left London on very early trains.

At four o'clock in the morning when the streets were quiet and the blood was thin, the telephone on Kellaway's desk sounded. He put down his cigarette quietly, balancing it on the rim of the ashtray before he picked up the receiver. It was a woman's voice that spoke briefly, without introduction or preamble. Kellaway, for his part, said nothing at all. When the woman had finished what she had to say, he replaced the receiver gently and got up from his chair. There was nothing in his movements to suggest that he had been sitting there, on and off, for seven hours. He walked across to the wall cupboard, opened it, and took out a new, soft, black hat and placed it carefully on his head, the brim tilted very slightly forwards and to the right.

Then he left the room, walked down into the courtyard, and woke up a dozing driver.

Ten minutes later he stopped the car at the end of a small street, spoke to the driver, who nodded, and got out, leaving the door open behind him.

He walked along the pavement, his crêpe-soled shoes making no noise, and stopped at a doorway. As he got there, the door opened. A middle-aged woman, a dressing-gown round her shoulders, was crouching inside. "First floor, back room," she said. "There's no lock on the door. The light switch is on the left as you go in. They promised—"

"Any promise that was made will be kept," said Kellaway. "Do your stairs creak?"

"Not a lot." He went up them, drifted along the corridor, and threw open the end door, slamming down the light switch.

Boot Howton was up, on one elbow; but both his hands were visible.

"I'm charging you," said Kellaway, "with the murder of Rosa Bezley on the night of twenty-eighth September at Binford Park Reservoir and I have to warn you that anything you may say will be taken down and may be given in evidence . . ."

© Michael Gilbert 1958

★ ***The third part of Blood on the Scales by Michael Gilbert, appears in next month's Argosy on sale November 7th.***

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to MICHAELMAS MIXTURE on page 92

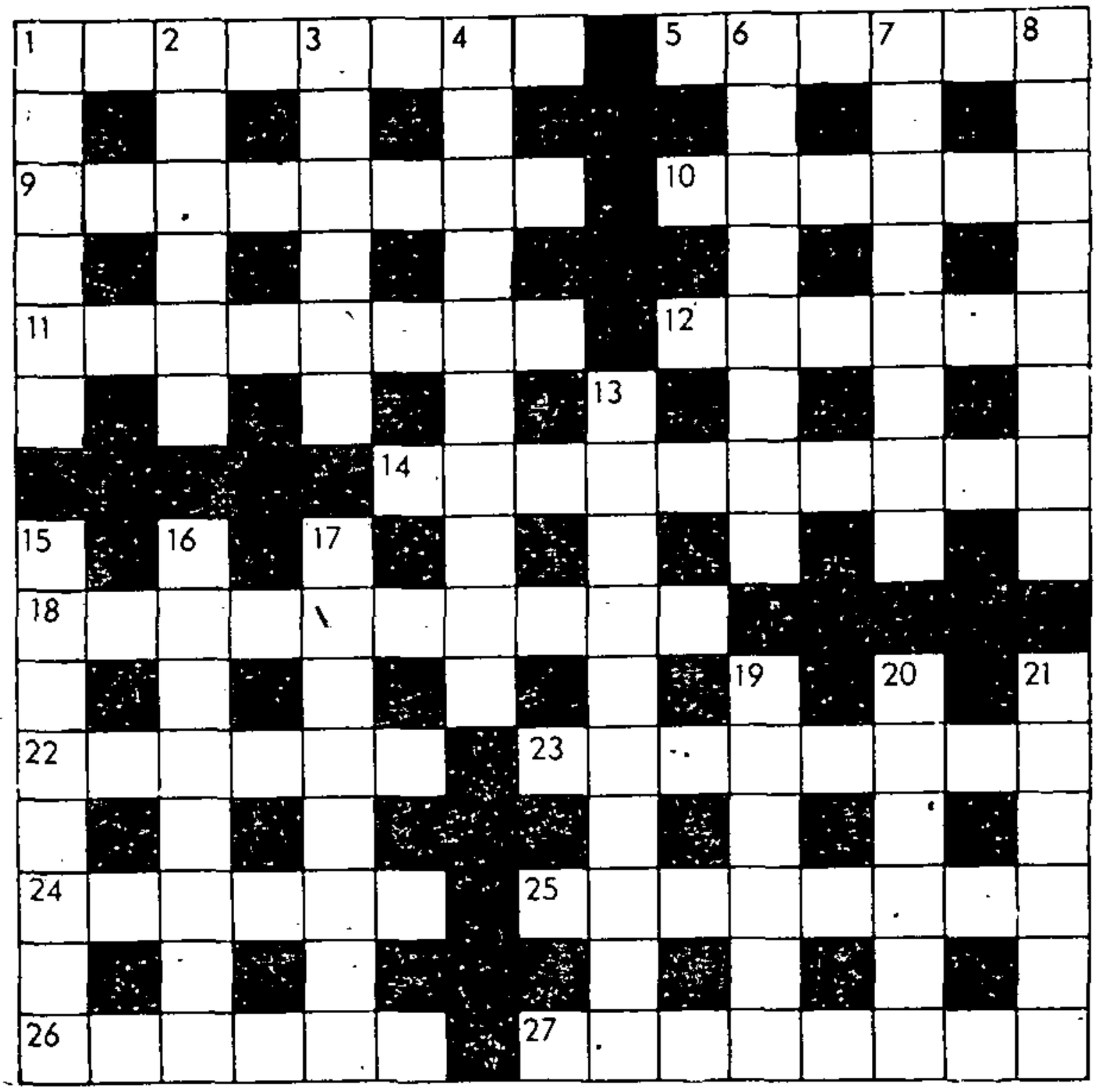
1. *A chess-player who touches a piece he does not intend to move.*
2. *Mrs. M. E. L. Mallowan; Sir Lewis Ritchie; Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch; Captain C. W. Mercer; Hector Munro.*
3. *A John Dory, so called from round spots on its sides.*
4. *Seventeen. Ben Jonson was the first.*
5. *The Muns, the Tityre Tus, the Hectors, the Scourers, the Nickers, the Hawcubites, and the Mohocks were a succession of London street bullies in the reign of Queen Anne.*
6. *The term was first used in the* 1820s. *John Macadam,* 1756–1836, *invented road-surfacing of crushed stone.*
7. *a. Sheridan; b. Charles II.*
8. *A surgeon's mate at sea.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Auckland.* 5, *Angels.* 9, *Sparrows.* 10, *Ignite.* 11, *Numbered.* 12, *Stream.* 14, *Floatation.* 18, *Inhumanity.* 22 and 24, *Yellow-hammer.* 23, *Creative.* 25, *Nursling.* 26, *Splits.* 27, *Hydrogen.*

Down. 1, *Absent.* 2, *Clammy.* 3, *Lurked.* 4, *New Zealand.* 6, *Night-jar.* 7, *Epidemic.* 8, *Steaming.* 13, *Canterbury.* 15, *Sisyphus.* 16, *Philomel.* 17, *Impotent.* 19, *Hawser.* 20, *Riding.* 21, *Bergen.*

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD



★

Solution on Page 143

★

CLUES

Across

1 Prime port of 4 (8).

5 Celestial old coins (6).

9 Hedge or house, they end in rows (8).

10 Light, penniless mixed dieting (6).

11 Counted senseless at first (8).

12 Mad master current (6).

14 Little Florence starts the launching (10).

18 Hum ! in silliness is cruelty (10).

22, 24 He asks for bread, not cheese (6-6).

23 Making vice tear (8).

25 A pound in the profession is its charge (8).

26 Divides acrobatic and fattening (6).

27 Information on watering place? (8).

Down

1 Such friends make toast (6).

2 Damp and bivalvular (6).

3 An earthly lover did at Belinda's heart, Pope said (6).

4 Land of fresh enthusiasm ? (3, 7).

6 But the bird holds no nightcap ! (5-3).

7 It's catching in a big way (8).

8 Hot mint and sage mixture (8).

13 Amble to inter music stand (10).

15 Forever he's a-roll-*ing stone* (8).

16 "——, with melody, Sing in our sweet lullaby " (Shakespeare) (8).

17 Nought keeps the little demon from the marquee (8).

19 Cable washer perhaps (6).

20 In Yorks, no more equine than 19 (6).

21 Norwegian port has icy approach (6).

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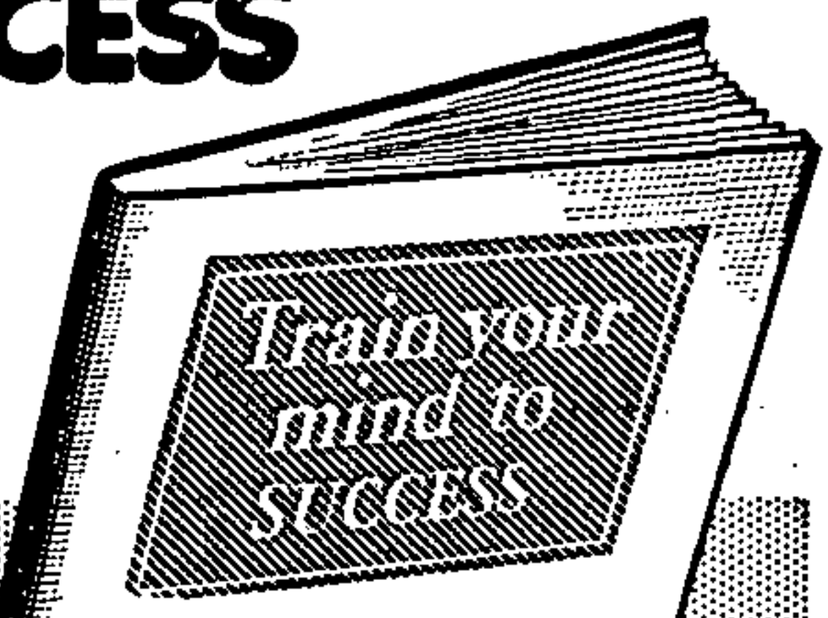

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